Girls' Frontline Commissions

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Girls' Frontline Commissions

About

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Summary: All the GFL-related commissions I've done (and will do in the future) will be uploaded here. (Credits for the art used in every chapter are given at the end of each chapter)

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Orsis commission N°1 - A Hero

There was a certain girl on top of a very tall building. She was laying down, with her chest resting on the floor and her hands confidently holding a tool of war. The barrel of the gun was 698.5mm long, its insides were .338in in diameter and it certainly didn't look light-weighted at all, but none of that seemed to matter to the small bird that came flying out of nowhere and landed its tiny talons around it, chirping around as if it was having the most relaxing day of its short life.

"A-ah, hey. Shoo, shoo-"

The girl, whose body was covered by a dark gray blanket, stretched her hand forward and gently sent the bird flying away. Not that she hated birds, but it would have been a problem if she needed to suddenly press the trigger and the bird was still there.

"Sigh..."
"What is wrong?"
"..."
"Orsis what is wrong?"
"Ah, no, no, it's nothing."
"Then please focus."
"Hum..."

She was not distracted; she's a good sniper, she's never distracted, and she knew a mere second of letting her mind waver around would be not a problem. She was a bit conflicted by something that most would find a trivial matter, but being sorted right when that show she had been waiting to watch for so long was aired did a number on her mood.

"45 minutes since IDW left, we should contact Team B."
"Grizzly said she would call us if needed."

"Then how would we know if someone surprised them and killed them both in just one strike? It's not logical just to wait for them to call."

The blue-eyed, red-haired sniper frowned just a bit, almost as if unconsciously. Her blue-haired, golden-eyed spotter put the binoculars on her face again and looked down at the city.This was Team A, composed of Orsis T-5000, the sniper, leader of the whole echelon, and Zas M21, her spotter. By the other side of the enormous central park of the city, on top of an unknown building around 750m away, was Team B, composed of M200, the sniper and Grizzly MkV, her spotter. IDW was certainly nowhere to be seen around.Zas took a hand to the small radio on her chest and a short beep followed.

"This is Zas M21. Is everything alright?"

There was a brief silence of around two seconds before the somewhat mature voice of a woman came from the other side of the signal.

"Ah, yes. Yes, everything's alright. Something happened on your side? I thought I told you girls I would call you if needed."

The red-headed sniper eyed at her spotter.

"Yes... yes, you did."
"So?"
"I just got a bit worried out of nowhere. You can forget about it."
"Alright... either way, if you want to know, we just got a call from IDW some minutes ago."
"Did she find anything?"
"No, not really. She was just complaining about how tired she was."
"Where is she now?""
See the stores block near the park? She said she found out almost every building there has a basement so she's checking them all."
"What would she find there?"
"Who knows? It won't hurt just to check. We haven't received that signal again so we still cannot pinpoint the source. Everything we are doing is wasting some time

until we can get our hands on something more substantial."
"Understood."

The spotter of team A cut the transmission and looked at the place of interest with her binoculars.
They were following the trace of an enemy signal. The strange part was the place it came from: a deserted town that hasn't seen action in years. Not a battle, no enemy presence, not a sudden raise in unknown activity. None of that. Just a single, unexpected, lonely communication signal that once demodulated only revealed noise behind. But that was seemingly enough for the commander to be assigned a recon mission.
And that was how those five girls ended up there.

"For now let us keep waiting, there's really nothing else we can do."
"Right..."

But not ten seconds after the communications with Team B was cut, the distant, subtle cry of an automatic gun could be heard in the silent city.

"That is...!"

And then, a pretty much more noticeable explosion resounds through the city. They both rush to locate the source of the noise with their respective zooming devices, and find a column of smoke being born from between two buildings in the stores block.

"Did IDW find-"

The radio cried out, not allowing Zas to continue.

"IDW here! I found it! The source of the signal! The-"

Another explosion took place, and then another one. The tall buildings trembled and the sound of collapsing concrete faintly filled the air.

"IDW?! Repeat! We could NOT hear you!"

That was the voice of Grizzly, from the other side of the park.

"IDW?! Report your status!"

Orsis and Zas looked at each other briefly. Had IDW found an enemy? Was the automatic fire hers? And where did the explosions come from? Orsis fingertip hit the side of her weapon a couple of times, anxiously, and just when Zas opened her mouth to seemingly give her an order, the radio spoke up again.

"I-I am fine, nya! I-I just-!"

Her voice sounded agitated and slightly pained, it was also quite obvious that she was running. But running from what? Until they didn't have that precise piece of intel, they could not start moving and prepare a response plan.Another explosion, but the radio did not go quiet this time.

"N-nya! E-enemies! I-Inside one of the basements here, I walked in and suddenly SOMETHING began moving and making weird noises, so of course I opened fire and the next thing I heard was the wall behind me blowing up! M-my arm..."
"Where are you now?"
"I-"

IDW had barely the time to run away, apparently, so she just couldn't keep up long strings of conversation even if she wanted.

"T-the park! I'm going to drive them to the park!"
"Them? How many enemies are behind you, IDW?"
"I-I could see two, but I can't be sure!"
"Any more details? What kind of units are they?"

The only thing they knew for sure, thanks to the info gathered through the demodulation of the previously recalled signal, was that it came from a Sangvis device, other than that, everything is unknown.

"T-two... three! There are three! I just saw another one turn around the corner- n-nya-!!"

As it was usual now, an explosion interrupted their conversation, except this time the avid red-haired sniper spoke before her spotter.

"There!"

Looking through the x8 sights of her long rifle, she pointed with her slender finger a certain shop without any distinguishable characteristics, which made it difficult for Zas to locate it. A mere second afterwards, a piece of the front wall of the shop felled down to the ground. It was not clear from their perspective, but such behavior was proof that the building was trembling. Bit by bit and rather sooner than later, the whole thing began crumbling down.
Orsis was too focused observing the development while Zas, once again, through radio, let Team B know about the place of interest.
At the very last moment, the dual front doors of the shop, which seemed to be something electronics-related, spread open in a burst as a blonde girl with some peculiar ears jumped out.

"IDW!"

The poor catgirl was all beaten up. Her hair was undone and it looked wild, there were scratches all over her clothes and her left arm, down from the elbow, was just not there anymore. Despite this, she looked fierce, glaring behind her as she ran.

"Head to the park, IDW!"

As if it was obvious right from the start, the girl didn't reply and just kept running. Her ears twitched once and she raised the automatic gun she carried on her right hand, aiming at whatever that was inside the building.
As she screamed in anger, she pulled the trigger.

"H-here they come!"

The snipers from both teams were more than just ready to neutralize any threat coming from the shop. Just then, when the whole frame of the edification was going to pieces, said threat allowed the sunlight to illuminate its metallic armor.

"It can't-!"

The four girls who hadn't seen their foe yet gasped at unison when the falling chunks of civilization simply broke against those terrifying legs. Unfazed it walked out, following the running IDW followed by a companion that looked exactly like itself.Grizzly was the first one to speak through the radio.

"Manticores! I can see two of them! Zas, can you confirm!?"
"I do! Two Manticores came from the shop! IDW you have to-!"
"N-nya! I know what to do!"

Having found their prey, one of the threatening Manticores aimed its cannon at the blonde girl, yet this had already tossed her weapon aside and the only thing

in her remaining hand was a jamming smoke grenade. She pinned it with her fang and threw it at the chaser's feet before picking her flag gun up and running away again.The smoke coming from the device used by IDW looked like nothing special, but it's effects were useful: negating the effectiveness of the electronic artifacts nearby, just enough time for her to run into safety. The downside: those precious seconds when the targets would be vulnerable could not be fully taken advantage of, since the dark cloud surrounded them.
Although...
T-5000 used the radio.

"M200! You surely remember the first Manticore's position!"

A soft voice replied, while the owner of such tone gazed at the screen of her ballistic calculator.

"I am only waiting for your order."
"Fire!"

They both shot at the same time, but not just two bullets were fired. Orsis T-5000 and M200 both showered the presumed target exact location with pieces of lead. They both emptied their magazines, reloaded and waited. Their confidence was amazing. There was nothing that could help them know if the bullets were actually hitting the target, or if the target was still even there, yet that didn't stop them. Now it was just a matter of time, all they could do was waiting for the smoke to vanish.

"..."

Zas stretched her neck upwards and the wind made the edges of her hair dance; her delicate fingers were holding the binoculars.And after half a minute of silence, the scene became clear.The Manticore that appeared second was 'looking' straight into the park, as if trying to locate the cat girl that had already vanished from its sight. The first Manticore was a broken mess. It was not 'dead' yet, for it still twitched and tried to lift its cannon, but the internal mechanisms in charge of its motion had already been busted to pieces by the ruthless fire of two sniper

rifles from somewhere unknown to the poor machine. Not only it had holes everywhere, but most of its wiring was easily seen electric sparks were covering its surface. Despite this much damage, the war machine tried to lift its cannon one last time...

"..."

But it was forcefully brought down by a projectile that the small-framed sniper of Team B fired upon it. Seconds afterwards, after twitching a couple of times more, the lights on the Manticore began fading off. Slowly, until it also stopped moving and remained there motionless.

"Target 1 is not moving."

Said Grizzly now focusing her sight on the second target.

"We are engaging on the second one. Where is IDW?"

Those were Orsis' words. And by her side Zas gazed towards the park.

"I see her. She's already by the other park of the green area. She looks fine, even if damaged."
"Zas..."
"What is it?"
"Please look at the shop the Manticores came from. The debris are..."

Zas followed the direction and clicked her tongue .

"The debris are shaking, aren't they?"
"IDW mentioned a third one. It must be trying to find the way out."

"What are we going to do, leader?"
"For now we'll get the second one before it finds us, then we'll find a way to take the third one out and kill it too."
"Understood."
"M200, get ready."
"I am."

But before she could even think about placing her index finger on the trigger, all the rubbish accumulated in the entrance of the electronics shop was blown away in a violent detonation. The four of them covered their faces with their forearms to prevent any small pieces of concrete to damage their optical modules, except Zas who was already using her binoculars.The whole place trembled, and even the second Manticore stumbled due the force of the explosion.

"It's the third one! But how..."
"Do not engage with that one!"

The voice of IDW took over the communications again.

"I-it's more dangerous! The weapon! It's not the same as the other ones!"

Zas had already visually confirmed this, since the last Sangvis robot was already crawling to the outside.

"What is..."

Mumbled Orsis when she noticed the noticeably heavier cannon the third target had assembled on its lower part.

"What is it....? Grizzly, do you have better visuals?"
"I have. I think it's a heat cannon or something like that."

"How has the second one not found us yet?"
"I don't know... could it have its sensors damaged?"
"But it followed IDW all the way out."

And the catgirl, now from a safe location, intervened.

"It only fired at me once I was right in front of it. I think it only has its basic optical sensors active."
"So it lacks any kind of tracking. It will never find us that way..."
"Orsis! The third one!"

Upon hearing M200's voice, the red-headed straightened up a bit and gazed at the mentioned unit.

"It is...!"
"It's aiming at your position! Its tracking systems might still be active!"

Orsis took her eye off of the optical sight of her gun, and less than half a second afterwards she felt the hand of Zas grabbing her shoulder quite strongly.

"We have to get out of here! It's charging up! M200, fire!"

It was not supposed to work like that, but M200 was not going to reject such a logical order even if it wasn't T-5000 who gave it. However, it didn't come in time, for when M200 pulled the trigger, the cannon of the third Manticore had already loaded up and fired at Team A.

"D-damn it!!"

But as quickly as Zas pulled from Orsis, the Manticore's attack was way faster.

Thankfully, not as precise, since the hit landed around four meters below them, destroying and burning everything in a one meter radius. The floor below their feet tumbled down, the gray blanket just fled out of their sight and they bounced against the scorched concrete.

"A-ah!"
"Let's move!"

Despite the roughness of the situation, none of them ever let go of their weapons.

"Let's move, if it has tracking devices it will surely fire at us again!"

A gunshot was heard. Presumably, M200 had started firing at their attacker. But they were in no position to help with their fire too, and so could only run. Having previously memorized the building, they quickly found the stairs and began running down them as the gunfire from M200 and the heated discharges from the cannon filled the area. The building trembled and dust fell down from the ceiling every time the Manticore fired.

"M200 are you not done with it?!"
"It is quite resistant, but I'm doing what I can. Are you both okay?"
"We are going down the stairs, please take it out hastily!"

No matter how much Zas insisted on M200, she was already doing all she could in order to kill the enemy. And she was in fact succeeding, the Manticore's armor was breaking down with every bullet that impacted on it, and every time it took it a little bit more of time to get ready to fire. But it was not done yet. And so, it fired again.

"W-what-?!"

Team A's building trembled a bit too much. Too much. The girls didn't stop, they were not that far from the bottom floor anyway, but they couldn't have expected the whole thing to come down so quickly. The infrastructure was already too damaged, so the last attack provoked the structure to be defeated by its own weight, and collapse violently to the center of mass.

"Oh shi- Orsis! Zas! You copy?!"

Grizzly could only yell at the radio as she saw the site the Team A choose as their nest falling apart. There was no response, no one replied. Not Orsis, not Zas.

"..."

M200 fired the last shot, and the Manticore with the heat cannon fell dead to the ground.

...

"... h-huh..."

Orsis woke up. How long was she out? Maybe not more than a minute. She stood up and looked around, and then at her own body.Minimal damage. Just a few scratches here and there, her weapon was by her side, unharmed too. And- oh... oh, there was in fact a problem. Was her left eye ruined? As soon as she tried to focus on a certain part of herself, the visual from such eye began twitching and... puff, it was gone.

"..."

Zas was nowhere to be seen. All Orsis could see was something that looked like a

basement. It would have been completely dark, if not because of the hole in the ceiling that allowed the sunlight to sneak in. The sniper rested her back against the wall after picking up her gun and sighed.

"... those are..."

Curtains. Everywhere the eye could see. The walls, the floor, the debris, the pillars that once functioned as supports for the building. There were also a lot of sewing machines, so it probably was a textile factory, that would explain the curtains too. They were in all colors. Green, blue, yellow, purple. She unconsciously looked for a red one, but there wasn't one.She didn't have too much time to think about it, since the radio yelled out just a sentence before it died. It was Grizzly's voice.

"The second Manticore is running to the building!"

The sniper was all alone, and her eyes opened wide when she saw the spider-like machine jump down to the basement.

. . .

The Griffin's dolls suspicions were right. The Manticore could only 'see' and 'hear', everything else it once had had already died long ago. So the robot's only way to identify a threat was to see it and compare it to the images in its database.
The Manticore dived into the basement and it remained steady. Once could compare it as when a person tries to have their eyes used to the darkness. When it felt ready, it slowly began turning in its place. It saw a completely destroyed place, where the only things that remained entire were... some curtains. There were a lot, a lot of long and wide curtains, but also short and narrow ones. There was a blue curtain, a green curtain, a purple curtain... and a red curtain.
The Manticore 'looked' at them all, but found nothing. Maybe it was moment to jump out of the place, there was nothing relevant there. The Manticore turned around to face the hole in the ceiling, and that was its last motion.

...

A curtain moved.
A curtain, that wasn't a curtain.
If only the robot had a tracking device, or some better optical modules, it could have noticed the cat locked in the room.
From behind the red 'curtain', a slender forearm stretched and quickly pulled the whole thing up. What laid behind the curtain was a disgusted T-Doll, who had used her own long, red, beautiful hair to simulate a piece of cloth and deceive the machine.
As her hair flied up in the air like the tail of a peacock, she raised her intimidating rifle to her hip and grabbed it with both her hands. At this distance, she did not need to properly aim.
She looked mad, and her blue eyes blazed like electric fire, locking on the Sangvis' core intently.
And she fired. Not once, not twice. She dumped her whole mag with enviable effectiveness, always striking in the same place. The damage induced was indeed so precise, it managed to tear the Manticore in half. It didn't even looked like the Manticore had time to 'die', it simply died, it simply stopped moving forever.
When it was done, she dropped the gun and let her body fall down, sitting on the floor, not being able to look at the robot because of the absurd amount of dust, powder, smoke and particles in the air.

"..."

What happened afterwards?

"..."

She sighed, looking up at the ceiling.

"... -sis... -sis! Orsis!"

Oh, there was Zas. Looking down from the hole in the ceiling, yelling without even a scratch on her pretty face.Orsis T-5000 closed her eyes, and wilfully shut herself down.

...

"And so, thanks to the way I, Grizzly MkV, wrote the report, we were given two full free weeks."
"It is evident there were many irregularities in our deployment, but taking advantage of it to denounce a mistreatment..."
"Are you happy with your free time or not, Zas?"
"I am, but-"
"Oh you worry too much!"

The cat intervened.

"It was their fault for not deploying a second recon echelon for us, wasn't it?"
"No it wasn't and-!"
"Whatever, nya~"

The silent gray-haired sniper smiled and spoke up.

"How does your new arm feel, IDW?"
"Oh? It is okay. It was no big deal, and it is refreshing to get new parts, too!"

M200 chuckled and Zas sighed, only for Grizzly to laugh.

"Hm? And where's our leader? Wasn't she the first one to be repaired?"
"Orsis, she is..."

Zas began speaking... but quickly quieted down. She didn't know how to put it, she didn't know how to make her sniper not to look too weird.

"She... she had something to wat- something else to do..."

The three other girls tilted their heads, questioning.

...

As for Orsis, she was in her room. With the lights out and getting used to her new eye, yes, but also with a serious look, gazing at the TV. Her commander complied. If she couldn't be there to watch her show, the least her commander could do for her was to record it and-

"Oh! There it is!"

She smiled at the TV.
When the commander walked in, she was already too into the show to notice the commander's entrance.
But that was something the commander already expected, and so Orsis didn't even initially realize when the commander sat by her side, with a bowl of popcorn, and quietly watched along her.

...

One way or another, she ended up winning this time.

- - -

Art: https://twitter.com/aka_SJD/status/1102715501657055238/photo/1

Mia commission N°1 - A single reason

The alarm clock goes off.
That should mean it's 5:30 am, and it's time for the very same person who turns the clock off to get up and ready for work. It should be a pain for anyone to wake up so early in the morning, but it's also true that over the past couple of years she has gotten used to it.
Getting out of bed, taking a shower, dressing up, wearing her glasses and checking her phone; a basic established routine helps getting oneself comfortable to take on a new day. At first, she thought wearing a black tie and tying her hair like that made her look too little feminine, but she has been called 'cute' so many times that such insecurities are no longer a worry: she's now proud of the way she looks.
If only she wasn't too quiet and shy, she would be able to show off such pride.

"Time to leave."

Standing one last time in front of that mirror in her room, she puts on that red beret and sighs.
A red beret, those red-framed glasses and that red strand of hair that stands out from the rest for not being brownish. Everything contrasts with her bright blue eyes.
Shooting a short smile towards her own reflection is the last thing she does before heading for the door.
A new day of effort means a new day of improving, and so, of course she goes for it with a smile on her face... even if such smile might completely disappear as soon as she steps out of that door. The last thing she wants is drawing attention to herself.
If only she wasn't so shy...

. . .

It happened around six years ago.
She was a teen by then, of around sixteen or seventeen years old. Over the years, the details have become a bit diluted and so she's not sure about the people that was around her. She was attending school, that's for sure. Perhaps arriving, or perhaps leaving, it's not clear. The only that is actually clear, is that the memory begins with someone, a girl to be more precise, yelling her name.

"MIA!!!"

And then an explosion.
She recalls walls breaking down, and the floor under her feet falling apart, leaving her up to the gravity's whims.
That was a hard fall, and as part of the building collapsed and Mia hopelessly fell towards a certainly painful hit against the ground, she managed to take a look to her side, peeking through the 'window' that was created by that stray 60mm projectile that nearly killed her. There was a van running down the street, with a bunch of black cars following close behind as they exchanged rifle fire with the people inside the van. A robust man who was wearing a black ski mask was leaning out the passenger seat, carrying over his shoulder an old-looking bazooka. Noticing his shot had terribly missed, the man simply dropped the launcher and got back inside.
The chase went on, quickly getting out of her sight. Not that it really mattered, since right when she was not able to see the black cars anymore, her body bounced against the hard concrete. A sharp pain invaded her whole self, and she lost consciousness not long after seeing how more pieces of the school building began raining down towards her.

"..."

She woke up a couple of hours later.
Every single inch of her slender frame hurt like hell. She felt like crying, but forced herself not to; the first thing she ought to do was to open her eyes and find out where exactly she was.

"Ah..."

She realized, she had already opened her eyes. She was just so confused and her surroundings were so pitch black, that there was basically no difference. This little bit of realization was enough to make her brain blaze in adrenaline. She suddenly became aware of the roughness of the ground, and also of the thick dust particles in the air she breathed in. She had cuts all over her body; she couldn't see them, but the warmth of her own blood tainting her skin was enough of a proof.
Was it all over for her?
Not only it was evident that she had no strength to move the debris from over her, but also the fact that she could see literally nothing must meant she was under tons of it, alive simply because of a convenient placement of the bigger pieces. This time, she really felt like crying, and she couldn't stop her own eyes from watering at the thought of dying such an unfair death. She could hear nothing coming from the other side of the wall of debris and, when she tried to scream for help, the dust got into her throat, making her choke in pain. What else could she do but crying? She forced her own limbs to move, battling against the pain, but it was utterly useless: no one could free themselves from such situation, not a single human being.

Hours went by, and she was not able to fall asleep anymore, even if she tried. The more the time passed, the less hopeful she was. She did stop crying upon calming down after the initial shock, since that was also pointless, just like screaming or trying to get out.
Just before her soul finally broke down completely, she let out a short sigh and mumbled to herself, as if she simply wanted to listen to her own voice.

"I don't want to die, not like this..."

A noise from far away.
To her, it sounded like a mermaid singing next to her ear, even if it was nothing but the sound of rubbish being thrown aside. Mia could feel some vibrations reaching her body through the very same concrete that was keeping her down. It was so fast, so sudden, that her mind was not able process it all.
More and more noises, and they only got louder by the second. She did even begin hearing some voices too.'This is the moment, this is when I should scream as loud as I can, even if I end up hurting my throat, so they can hear me and rescue me.'
And just when she opened her mouth to let out the loudest scream she has let out her whole life, someone freed her from her concrete coffin.
Covered by the orange sunset, there was a girl standing in front of her, the very same girl that tossed aside that big and heavy-looking piece of debris; it was definitely too big of a piece to be moved away by a girl with such slender arms.
Mia was speechless. Her mouth closed slowly as the girl standing there, all victorious with her white hair tied in a low ponytail, mumbled in a low voice while taking a hand to her own ear.

"I found the last one."

Mia's shock was even bigger than when she found herself deep down, buried and almost certainly dead. That girl looked so frail, she was certainly not taller than Mia, and both her arms and legs looked too... weak. But she was not weak, of course she wasn't, she alone was able to rescue her after all.

"Mhm, she looks fine. I'll take her to the... yes, understood."
"Ah-"

Mia finally let out a voice, at which the other girl replied with a calm, lazy-looking smile. She crouched and offered Mia a hand.

"I am the Tactical Doll M200. I have come to rescue you. Are you okay? Can you move?"
"Y... yes... I think..."
"Good."

Only when her hand took that of the Tactical Doll, Mia realized she was already

able to move her limbs without much of a worry, except for the pain. How could she not notice as soon as she was freed? Was she perhaps too lost in the sight of that petite girl saving her, that she forgot about what it meant to be saved?
Those fingers got a firm grip of Mia's hand, and Mia allowed them to pull her and help her sit.
The Tactical Doll discretely peeked behind Mia, and sighed calmly when she didn't see a pool of blood. This made her smile a bit more relaxed, looking back into Mia's eyes.

"I'm glad no one died here. You were the last one to be found, so I was worried that we might have been a bit too late."
"..."
"But that's not important anymore. You're fine... and you're not even crying, are you? You must be a brave girl. Here, let me- woah!"

Ignoring the pain that still lingered all over her, Mia threw herself over the Doll's chest and hugged herself to it, sobbing quietly, unable to express her thankfulness in any other way.

"Th-there, there! Y-you're fine now, so... er..."

The young Mia felt that small hand on top of her head and, while she knew she was interfering with the Doll's job, didn't let go of that doll for a good while.

. . .

So, in the end, what's this commander's goal? Why did she want to become a commander?
As she reaches the cafeteria and looks around at the lively place, a certain white haired Tactical Doll walks close to her, while holding a cup of black coffee in her hand. Inadvertently, their gazes meet. Mia freezes for a second, yet the Doll smiles politely, tilting her head to the left.

"Good morning, Commander Mia."
"... good morning, M200."

And she leaves. M200 goes for a table on the farthest corner of the cafeteria, exchanging greetings with a red haired doll and a blueish haired one too.
As for Mia, she simply sighs and smiles.
Mia wants to become a good commander. The best, if possible.
That way, one day M200 will also be under her command.
Even she finds such goal a bit strange, but it's not like she has any doubts about it.
A step at a time.
First, she must go and have breakfast.
Hopefully, no one will make her panic by asking her why is she smiling like that

so early in the morning.

If only she wasn't so shy...

- - -

Art: @/gkamikaze_d (Twitter)

Orsis commission N°2 - The Riders of Red (head) //Part 1//

This is a story from quite a long time ago. It's not exactly the 'beginning' of the whole story, but it's the beginning of the 'current' arc of the story. If that even makes some sense.
It's a tale from when that red-curtain-haired T-Doll arrived to the base where she resides even to this day, even before she got to meet her commander.
Orsis T-5000 is a bit on the silent side, since she prefers to avoid attention (partly because of her role as a sniper), but this doesn't mean she's not quite the magnet for messy situations. For example, this happened just after she did her first step into GnK. She hadn't even properly signed anything yet.
But, there she was, wandering around the hallways, trying to follow the indicated directions in order to find the commander's office... when, turning around a corner, a certain flying midget turned around in her direction, bumping against her with a loud *thud*.

"Wah-!"

The doll fell sitting on the ground holding her nose which had just been hit by a heavy, metallic 'something'. That 'something' was also holding its face, despite not having really received any kind of hit.

"W-watch out, you jerk! Can't you see I'm-?! Ah-! They're coming!"

When Orsis opened her eyes, she saw a furiously red light rushing behind her, hiding from the two T-Dolls that came around the same corner, looking for it.

"Where did she...? You! Ah... I-I don't know you, you must be new. Have you seen a tiny red girl flying around here? Yes? You did? Where did she ran to?!"
"Ah..."
"Quickly!"
"A-around that corner!"
"Thank you!"

That blonde, tall tactical doll ran away like her life depended on it, followed by a smaller one, with green eyes and her body full of scars.

"Ah..."
"..."
"... are you-"
"Hey, thanks for that!"

Finally, the little fairy went out of her hiding spot and floated in front of the still amazed Orsis, showing off a bright smile and crossing her arms in a victorious stance.

"You didn't rat me out! You must be quite a good girl... or a delinquent. Both are fine with me! My name is Fury, what's yours?"
"..."

T-5000 was speechless. Everything happened in less than ten seconds, and it was surely a miracle that no one else was walking through those hallways at the moment, or her reputation would have ended up on the ground just after arriving her new home.

"Can't you talk? Do you lack a speaking module or..."
"N-no, no! I can talk, it's just... nothing. I-I'm Orsis T-5000, I have just arrived and..."
"Oh, new girl. Welcome to our precious base at-"

In the middle of her introduction, that flying troublemaker was interrupted by a loud scream that spit something among the lines of 'she's not here either, damn it!'.

"Ah, crap. We can't stay here. Follow me!"

And just like that, practically being dragged around without another choice but getting into shady business before even getting to see her own room, Orsis followed Fury almost certain that she was making the wrong pick.. . .That little fairy, that was in fact nothing but a drone terminal with the purpose of supporting echelons of T-Dolls in battle, forced Orsis to remain hidden until things settled down.
Inside a warehouse. Quiet. Still. Silent. Hugging her own legs as the fairy peeked through the keyhole the whole time.
A whole hour passed.
Why was she to hide too? She hadn't done anything bad. Besides, of course, covering the fairy that had apparently been misbehaving. But that wasn't enough for her to get into trouble! Or... was it?

"Alright... we're finally free to go. Jeez, I killed nobody. Just a little prank shouldn't be enough to get anyone this mad... Okay! You... ah... you... er..."
"Orsis T-5000."
"Yeah! Orsis! The new girl! Come with me, let me show you around as payment for lending me a hand back there!"
"Show me around?"
"Yes. You've just arrived so I'm sure you must be having a bad time. This is a big base, after all. I'll walk you around the best spots."
"I... need to meet the commander. I haven't introduced myself yet..."

"Oh, that can wait! I'll leave the commander's office for the finale. Why don't we... T-5000, you must be a sniper, right? Why don't we get to the roof? All of you girls seem to like high places!"
"It's not as much as we like them, but-"
"This way!"

. . .

The roof.
It was... a roof.
Orsis looked around... and sure, her most professional side identified a nice couple of spots she would probably pick if she was to defend the place one day, but visiting it right then was so uncalled for that she could do nothing but sighing at the sight.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"
"..."
"... not for me, though. I'm not really fit for this kind of long-ranged combat. Alright, to the next place we go."

. . .

"This is the firing range! Dolls come here both to train their skills and to have a good time! Many of them feel joy when practicing their marksmanship, but most of them are unsure if that's something they decide to like on their own or if it's written into their core by default!"
"What?!"
"Yes! They train for war, but that's not the point!"

The firing range.
There were eleven dolls training there.
Five of them were carrying MGs, and so the noise was so loud it was practically useless trying to communicate through speak.
Orsis also saw a commander in there. It was a woman, she was wearing ear protection, but, even so, her face showed annoyance.

. . .

"This, is the inner yard. There are not many things to mention here. It's just a place where the girls and the commanders come to relieve some stress."

The inner yard was massive. It was actually more than just a bit too big. Orsis skills allowed her to determinate that the place must have been of two hundred square meters big, or so. The fairy was right, that base was just TOO big.
Full of green. Bushes, trees and even some artificial tiny lakes with ducks, frogs and insects. A miniature paradise of sorts.

"They like to come here and just sit or lay around, often reading a book, listening to music through their earphones or straight up taking a nap. We've had some cases of commanders that get so attached to this place that they end up not returning to their rooms. But it's fine, those were fired. Your commander is not that kind of person, so don't worry."

Orsis wondered about that. How could she not, when she saw that smiling doll with the pale hair and the skirt sleeping against a tree without a worry in the world.

. . .

"And this is the cafeteria, the most popular place in the whole base. I won't tell you why, you'll find out that by yourself."
"What do you mean?"
"I mean that this place is more frequented by... practically everyone, than any other common room. If you asked around 80% of the whole base population what do they do in their free time they'd say they come here to sit down and drink the tasty coffee that the woman behind the bar makes. They also serve drinks at night, or so I've been told."
"Oh, so you're even allowed to drink alcohol..."
"Yep! It wasn't like that some years ago, though. A certain commander pushed too hard for it, and from what I heard he gathered some other commanders and a bunch of dolls and striked until it was allowed, but I'm not sure about who that commander was."

For a couple of seconds, Orsis was so baffled she didn't find the right words to describe how she felt about it.

"But those are old stories now! Sit around there, I'll go and ask for... is coffee good?"
"Y-yes, it's fine."

T-5000 sat down where she was told and saw Fury leave for the bar, then she sighed. Finally, she was given a moment to breath calmly, close her eyes and order her own thoughts. Some things happened, and now she was on the run with a tiny red-haired girl that floated around in a drone. She had definitely screwed her first impression. The very first thing her new commander was going to know about her is that she caused trouble just five minutes in the base. Ah, it was going to be a rough way ahead.
When she opened her eyes, she decided to take a look around. The cafeteria was a long yet somewhat narrow room, showing off those elegant wooden walls and illuminated by many hanging candelabra. There were countless tables and chairs all over the place, and many of them were occupied by small groups of dolls that were seemingly either back from or about to part to an operation. A tall and blonde one, a very short one with green eyes, a rather muscular one... Orsis was

just impressed by the variety of characters she was yet to know in her new home. The biggest incognita was, of course, her new boss: the commander. Just what kind of person was it? She seriously expected it wasn't anyone too serious, otherwise a severe scolding was awaiting for her...

"I'm back! Sorry, there were some girls ahead of me. Our order will be here in no time."

Fury didn't sit down. She floated down slowly until the drone was right above the chair by the other side of the table, facing the entrance door.

"And now..."
"Now we're going to enjoy some coffee with pastries and then I'm taking you to your commander, I already know all about it."
"I-I see... then... about that..."
"Hm? What is it? Something on your mind?"
"It's just... I would like to know what kind of person the commander is."
"Oh, so that was it... well..."

Before the expecting yet calm gaze coming from Orsis's eyes, the fairy scartched her chin wtih her thumb and index, as if carefully picking her next words. A blue-haired doll wearing a certainly skimpy outfit walked next to their chair, at which Orsis blushed slightly.

"I wouldn't really know that much, he's not my commander so I haven't talked to him before."
"Him? So, the commander is a man?"
"Uh? Oh, yeah. Yours is. He's a... hm... well, he's... tall, I think. Maybe. Or maybe not that much. I don't know, I didn't pay much attention."

Displeased, Orsis could only sigh. She at least learned something: the commander was a man and, at least in her experience, that meant it was highly possible there was indeed a scolding waiting for her. Her mood soured.

"All I know is that he works very hard. Or... so I've been told, I think."
"..."

A workaholic. That was even worse. Orsis was, by all means, doomed. At least in her imagination, she was.

"But you'll know all about him later! For now, why don't you tell me about yourself? You have just arrived, and that means I'm your first friend! I wish I could tell you about me, but there isn't really a lot to say. I've been here since I was made and I've known nothing but missions and orders, and hundreds of scoldings because of some grumpy dolls that don't take fun very well."
"Is that the reason you're being chased for?"

"Mhm, that is."
"I get it now..."
"Yeah... but who cares! Come on, tell me, why did you come here?"
"Why? Hum... mainly because I had no other choice."
"Ah? How so?"
"I, er-"
"THERE YOU ARE!"

Orsis jumped back and covered her own mouth with two hands as the fairy suddenly floated away from her seat and furiously yelled at the cat on the entrance. This cat was actually a T-Doll of golden, dishevelled hair and mostly on the short, slim side. Obviously, everyone else in the cafeteria also went as silent as Orsis and leaned to take a peek of whatever that was happening at the door.

"You! How dare you abandon me like that?! We were supposed to be a team! I can't believe you would stab me from the back!"

Everyone in the place stopped consuming whatever they had asked for, the words coming from the fairy's mouth were powerful. Even those working in the kitchen peeked out.
The cat, on the other hand, frowned and looked away as one and another accusation was thrown her way. It was not the frown of someone who was annoyed of getting yelled at, it was the frown of someone that was just publicly exposed.

"A-actually, it's a lot more complicated than just that, nya. I-I... hum..."
"You saw those two coming and hided without warning me!"
"B-but I-"
"You traitor!"

Fury leapt towards that blonde cat with who knows what intentions, but her frame was stopped by the hand of that long-haired, just arrived sniper. Orsis stood between the two with trembling lips and a clearly nervous look in her eyes.

"P-please stop. P-people... are watching you making a scene..."

Everyone was watching.
Those calmly sipping from their cups, those standing against the bar, the waiters, the cooks...Even that commander woman, with the dark, properly combed hair and the slim-framed glasses that was sitting alone in a corner.

. . .

"So, if I got it all right..."

That redhead took a deep breath.

"You both girls played around, sneaked through the vents and saw the chance to scare other girls. When you got out of the vents, some angry girls were waiting for you and so you had to run... and, at some point, IDW took advantage of the situation and hid inside a locker while those other girls chased behind Fury."
"Ugh..."
"Then Fury found me and... we know the rest."

Having correctly drawn the timeline inside her head, Orsis smiled contently and nodded for herself.

"See? She's a traitor! We should break her apart!"
"Wait, Fury. We should at least... listen to her."
"Hum..."

If something, Orsis noticed that the cat-eared girl, whose name was IDW, felt guilty... maybe just a little bit. This was enough for her to try and help those two make amends.
After all, a hero is someone who helps people in need, and people trying to compensate for their own mistakes are, at some degree, people in need.

"Why did you leave Fury behind, IDW?"
"It was not on purpose, nya. I just, kinda... heard them running towards us and knew we wouldn't be able to escape so I instinctively hid and-"

Orsis squinted her eyes a bit.
They are T-Dolls, androids. They possess no such thing as an 'instinct'.

"-and when I realized I had left her alone it was too late, they were already chasing her away, nya..."
"Huh..."

Orsis carefully gazed towards Fury. To her surprise, the fairy was nodding, as if sympathetically understanding the cat's side of the story. She wanted to voice out that she didn't buy it, but that would have only caused more problems.

"I see. Yes, yes, I see it all clearly now, cat. If you hadn't left me behind, we both would have ended up scrapped..."

Orsis knew that was quite a stretch of an exaggeration, but Fury looked quite serious about it.

"A-alright. Does this mean that you both are in good terms now?"
"I'm not mad anymore. I'll still make her pay for abandoning me like that, but I'm not angry."

It was clear IDW knew she was having it quite easy, for she sighed a silent

chuckle. Orsis noticed it, and right when she was about to give the cat a piece of her mind, the flying redhead audibly stretched her arms upwards as she floated away, with the other two following her.

"Hmn~! Ah, I think we played around enough. Are you ready, Orsis? I'm taking you to the commander's office."
"Finally!"
"Yeah! I think you'll do fine. Do you know what to tell him?"
"Hm? Yes, I think. I simply need to introduce myself and... and that's it."
"Eh? That's not enough, nya."

IDW intervened.

"If your introduction is lame you'll end up doing logistics for the rest of your contract here, nya. You need to impress him! Better tell him about... hm... your past operations, nya, or some other interesting experience you have."
"But, all of that was already in my resume, so-"
"He doesn't read those, nya."
"I see... wait, how do you know? Is your commander..."
"Yes, nya. We have the same commander, I already knew about your arrival."
"R-really?! Then could you please-"
"Attention, girls! Here we are."

Fury moved next to a rather boring looking wooden door, which was labelled as 'Commander's Office' in a silver plate.
IDW also walked next to it, and leaned her back against the wall with her arms crossed on her chest.

"Try to go for a good first impression, nya! And be confident, otherwise you'll never see some action ever again!"

That would be hell for Orsis. How could she be a hero, if she spent her whole life lifting boxes and driving trucks?!
That professional sniper stood before the door and took a deep breath. She looked confident, that was for sure. So confident, that without even thinking about the first words she'd say upon opening that door, she raised her hand and knocked on that door. It was fine, of course it was fine. She was going to show her new commander how efficient she was.

"Come in."

A single thread of a rough, manly voice came from the other side. It was the voice of someone who was either bored, or tired. Whatever the case was, Orsis went a bit pale.

"Come on, don't chicken out now!"

Fury cheered her on, and Orsis turned that knob and walked in with the most serious intent. She closed behind, and without even taking a look at the office, nor locking eyes with the commander sitting by the other side of that gray desk three meters away from her, she stood at attention, saluted and raised her voice enough to fill the whole room.

"Orsis T-5000 reporting! Ready for deployment whenever my skills are needed, sir!"

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Art: https://www.pixiv.net/en/artworks/70912033

Tora Commission N°1 - All good children receive gifts at Christmas

"Alright, girls! It's time to go to bed. Look, it's already one hour past your bedtime. You need to sleep enough or you'll be too tired tomorrow. And you don't want to get sleepy in the party, do you?"

All the little girls replied with a long, sustained 'no', at which the only adult in the dinning room smiled with a nod. Only one of them spoke up; a certain girl with some fluffy bear ears atop her head.

"Auntie, won't you go to bed too?"

The adult woman's brows twitched. But she's a naturally loving person, and so she remained calm and her smile didn't leave her face.

"... I have told you not to call me that, remember? No, I can't go to bed yet. I have to help the others get everything ready for tomorrow. I believe Santa won't come if we don't do our best."
"Oh, okay!"
"Yes, yes. Now go to bed with the others, please."

The bear-eared girl jogged away, joining her friends as they all left for the dorms. All of them waved at their caretaker as they left.

"Goodnight, auntie!"
"Rest well, auntie!"
"See you tomorrow, auntie!"
"..."

Once she was left alone, she dropped her head and sighed. Shortly after, she turned around and walked away, rubbing her right temple as she mumbled.

"Maybe I should just give up..."

. . .

But there was a.... rather small group of little delinquents who decided not obey. The four of them remained hidden amongst the shadows in the corner of the

room and didn't come out until it was very late already and all the lights went off. Only then, the tallest one of those children (curiously the one who dragged the most attention because of her bright red hair) peeked out and nodded to herself.

"It's clear now."

Behind her, the second tallest of the group, MP40, nodded in approval and then looked back as the shortest tried to console the second shortest of them all.

"We'll find them, G36. And then we will sneak into the dorm and no one will have noticed us."

No matter how much Lee-Enfield tried to cheer her friend up, it didn't seem to work all that well. MP40 intervened.

"She's right. You've already told us where you have been today, so we only need to check those places and we'll be sure to find your glasses."
"H-hmn... o... okay..."

Curiously, there was something in MP40's words that did manage to make G36 stop sobbing.

"Shall we get going, Orsis?"
"Yes. I see no one, and all the lights are off. Plus, the only noises I hear come from the dorms, and so the preparations for tomorrow must be already done."
"Mhm. Then, first we need to go to..."
"Th-the yard, HP-35 and I were playing there in the morning..."

Lee couldn't help it but to tilt her head. Blinking a couple of times, she spoke.

"But that's.. how could you have lost your glasses so early in the morning and not have noticed up until now?"
"Th-that's because-"
"Shh! There's someone..."

Orsis rushed them all back into their hiding spot. Both Lee and G36 hugged themselves to MP40.

"Huh..."

That red-headed doll squinted her eyes, trying to discern a bit more of whatever moved across the darkness. She saw something red. Whatever it was, it simply stood there nearby a table, took something from a counter and then walked back its steps.
Red... Orsis was to remember that. They were not alone, there was definitely someone else wandering around the silent base.

"We have to be careful, if we get seen-"
"We won't be getting any gifts!"
"Huh?"

Even Orsis turned around worried as she heard Lee's voice.

"What do you..."
"I heard it before... Auntie said that those children who don't sleep the night before christmas don't get any gifts. We are in grave danger! This is a crisis!"
"I-I had no idea about that."

Orsis looked at MP40, as if asking for some kind of confirmation. The german doll nodded with serious face.

"Yes, I heard that too. It's too dangerous for us to continue."
"Too dangerous..."

As Orsis and MP40 looked at each other, seemingly trying to determine if it was prudent to resume this search or if it was better to wait for the next day, they heard a quiet sob. Turning their head to the side, they saw G36 staring down into the ground.

"... we should, er..."
"We are finding those glasses one way or another!"

The way the only russian T-Doll in the group raised her voice made the rest look up at her in a slight awe.

"Don't cry, G36. I promise you'll get back your glasses this very night!"

And before the little blonde could even thank Orsis for her willingness to help her, the latter had already sneaked away, heading to the nearest hallway.

"W-woah..."
"Orsis is... Orsis is amazing..."

The two little ones walked behind her completely amazed, while MP40 walked behind them all, trying not to giggle; she knew Orsis was simply doing her best to be the hero she wants to be.

. . .

"Hm... not here..."
"Neither here. MP40, any luck?"
"No, not here..."

G36 said nothing. She was also, just like the rest, crawling on the grass all over a

certain part of the yard, cautiously looking for her own glasses, but every single minute that passed only made her feel more and more like crying.

"Hum... we should maybe check somewhere else."

MP40 looked up at the one of the only three lights that were on, dimly illuminating that extensive yard. Of course, she knew there was a camera there, and it was a predictable fact that they were going to get scolded the next day, but she didn't want to add yet another worry for the other three girls. She kept on searching, like a good girl.
Threes, bushes, benches. The yard was truly a nice place for the children to play and, even at night, the urges to run around for a bit were not faint. It was right at the center of the base, and everyone gathered there frequently to take a small break, so it was not impossible that someone else could have found the glasses already and were just waiting for the opportunity to hand them back. Once again, MP40 couldn't just speak up her mind about it. It would not feel nice if the girls felt they were searching for nothing. Thinking that her choice was that of a good girl, she kept on searching.

"Yes, we have covered a quarter of the yard now. G36-"
"We only played here, it's no... n-no... no use..."

And she started sobbing again.
Luckily, Lee was just behind her and was quick to hug her arm, which both startled and made the little german stop.

"Then we just need to look in the next place! The night is young, and no one will wake up for at least some hours more!"
"That's true, there's no reason to get sad yet. Tell us, what else did you do today?"
"H-hum... we... C-MS and I followed HK45 to the banquet hall."
"HK45?"
"Y-yes. She singed for the people there... we were only a few, but she still did her best. C-MS and I liked it, and we spent like... an hour there, I think."
"Hm... what do you think, Orsis?"
"We should check. It's not far and absolutely no one goes there at night."
"Alright, then..."

As MP40 straightened her back and gazed towards the entrance to the main building, she went pale. However, she said not a word.

"If not then, then were?"
"Er... hm... oh, we also played hide and seek around the logistics' warehouse."
"We should see that place too..."

The two little ones were still talking, yet MP40 couldn't even move a muscle. Orsis noticed this and tilted her head to the left, quite surprised. Coming closer,

she placed a hand on MP40's shoulder.

"What is it?"
"... Orsis, that is..."

When the to-be-hero followed the other's eyes, she also went pale.
It was extremely clear who was that person that was walking away from them, venturing into the hallways with their back facing the kids. Red and white clothes, a big sack on its back and a pointy red hat with a white pom-pom at the end.
Orsis and MP40 were, to say it gently, horrified. Even the previously shown valiance had vanished from Orsis' eyes. No, that's not enough. Orsis was straight up at the verge of crying.

"I-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-it's-"
"Y-yes, that's..."
"Orsis, the d-danger level of this mission has just... e-escalated..."
"..."
"O-Orsis?"
"W-we cannot stop now! W-we said we were going to help G-G36 a-and that's what we're going to do!"

The figure faded from their line of sight, and they both felt like they were allowed to breath again.

"But Orsis! You... you do realize what is at risk here?"
"Yes, not getting gifts tomorrow..."
"No, it's much, much worse than that. Orsis, if we are seen by SANTA himself... we are not getting gifts ever again. We will forever be tagged as naughty kids. Not even coal. Nothing. Christmas will..."

With every single word coming from the blonde's mouth, Orsis' eyes got wetter and wetter.

"... christmas will ultimately disappear for the four of us."

Just at that moment Lee and G36 stopped talking, noticing the gloomy air between the other two. They looked at them with a mix of worry and curiosity in their eyes.
Orsis frowned briefly and wiped her eyes with her forearm.

"... we... we have to keep going. G36's glasses are not going to find themselves..."
"Orsis..."

The hero walked ahead, leaving the worried MP40 behind.
As for the other two...

"Woah..."
"Woah...! Orsis is so cool!"

They formed the very same line as before, yet this time MP40 eyes looked a bit more severe: if it was to be done, then it must be done right.

. . .

The banquet hall.
An elegant place used both for big events and just occasional recreation activities the dolls carried out for their own enjoyment.
Some of them used it to show off their artistic talents, and some just liked the classy aura and delighted on a nice afternoon spent in the company of other dolls with similar interests.
It was dark then, and there were christmas decorations all over the walls, the many tables and chairs and the scenario. Clearly, it was going to be used for some kind of event the next day, and this just meant the girls needed to take extreme precautions not to leave any trace of their presence.
They four of them walked on tip-toes and managed to rake the whole room without making much noise. Nevertheless, it was useless.

"Sigh, we're never going to find them..."
"Don't give up, G36! We have only been searching for an hour and a half, we still have some time! Besides, both Orsis and MP40 are with us, we are SURE to find them in the end!"
"..."
"Isn't that right, MP40?"
"Me? Ah, y-yeah, for sure... we will."
"Hm...?"

But Lee's confusion was not eased.
MP40 couldn't stop herself from discretely taking peek after peek towards the entry door. They were so exposed. If santa walked in, there was no way for them to hide in time. Surely, there was no reason for santa to go there at the moment, but she wasn't sure anymore.

"Whatever the case-"

Orsis jumped down from the scenario and walked to her friends; her eyes shinning with passion once again.

"Clearly, the glasses are not here. Onto the next room. You mentioned that warehouse, didn't you?"
"Yes. I recall us leaving HK45 concert a bit early."
"Oh? Why?"
"Because the lights they used reflected too brightly on my glasses and my eyes

were starting to..."
"..."
"OH! That's right! I still had my glasses when I left the banquet hall!"
"Which means you went to play with your glasses still on."
"Yes! And after that we played hide and seek! I remember the warehouse being too dusty, and- oh! And I remember my glasses getting dirty because of it! Then... then I took them off to clean them and..."
"And you don't remember anything else."
"Yes, that's right."
"That's our winning ticket!"

Lee raised her fist into the air, and the other three nodded at her. That was the clearest hint they had, and it was also their best bet.
Once again, with Orsis taking the front and MP40 taking the back, the little delinquents sneaked away. Only two of them knew about the real danger of the operation.
Time was not a problem, it was still very early.
But caution.
Caution, was vital.

. . .

It was the very G36 the one who, standing on tip-toes, lock-picked the door that lead into the warehouse. She was quite quick too, MP40 was impressed, but she decided not to say anything.
The door slowly opened to the inside, and G36 walked in.

"I was hiding behind that box, but we should probably check everywhere..."

There was nothing special about the box that G36 pointed at, asides from being an excellent hiding spot for someone of her size. It was just another box of the countless that laid around, properly ordered either on the shelves or the pallets in the dark warehouse. It was, certainly, dusty. Not really because the place wasn't taken care of, but mostly because there were dozens of boxes that hadn't been moved from their place in ages.
Lee got closer to that box and looked around, but then looked back at the rest and shook her head.

"I see. Alright, girls. Let's look around, those glasses must be here."

MP40 cheered them all and the group, once again, got down to work.
Orsis climbed on the shelves, MP40 looked through them, and Lee and G36 searched all over the ground.

"Just... a little more. I'm sure they are around..."

But Orsis stopped herself from saying a single word more.
Tap, tap, tap.
...
Tap, tap, tap...
Steps.
Orsis froze, and quickly jumped down from the shelves.

"Oh! There they-!!"

The red-headed sniper covered G36's mouth with her hand and pulled the girl with her into a the shadows, between two shelves. She followed the little girl's gaze and saw the so beloved glasses on the floor, laying right next to a couple of stacked pallets.
Good thing, the glasses were found.
Bad thing, the steps had stopped right by the other side of the door.
Orsis tried to found the other two girls in the room, but she couldn't find them. This was a good thing, since it meant MP40 had found a great hiding spot for the both of them.
'Now, please don't be...' thought the russian doll for herself.
Along with a faint gasp of surprise, probably because of the finding that was realizing the door was unlocked, another individual got into the warehouse.

"... h-hmn...!"

Orsis could feel the rush of emotions coming from G36 just by the way her lips trembled.
There he was: Santa.
It was hard to see because of how dark the room was, but those colours were extremely distinguishable even without much light.
Red, white, and a big sack on his back. It was santa, there was no doubt about it.
This santa stood in the middle of the room and looked around, probably wondering about why was the warehouse in the first place.
For the girls, what was going to happen next was very predictable: Santa was going to PERSONALLY find them and apply onto them the capital punishment (christmas version); no more gifts for any of them, forever and ever.
They were all shaking, pale, and even the 'older' ones were holding back some tears.
That santa let out a short sigh.
It was over.
He dropped the sack on the floor, and it made a loud and bulky noise. The girls felt like it crushed her christmas dreams when it fell. MP40 closed her eyes, and Lee too.

"... hehehe~"

Santa let out a... rather feminine chuckle.

He could barely be seen looking for something inside that bag, apparently moving aside some other stuff, until he pulled out a small flashlight and turned it on, pointing at a shelf that, luckily, wasn't being used as a hideout by any of the girls.

"..."
"..."
"..."
"..."
"..."

The four of them went blank.
No, that would not be enough to describe the complete lack of emotion in the face of those tiny scoundrels.
Both MP40 and Orsis stopped covering the mouth of Lee and G36, and all of them said, in a very quiet and unimpressed voice, at the same time:

"That's not Santa."

The fake Santa smirked victoriously as she dragged a peculiar cardboard box from the back of the shelf.

"That's SVD."

The T-Doll in the center of the warehouse, wearing that pretty christmas outfit, pulled out a transparent bottle from the box.

"And she smells weird."

There was already a faint shade of red on her white face, and it got only brighter once she confirmed the bottle was sealed.

"She has been drinking."

Said Orsis, the only one who recognized the smell of the drink coming from her, while her senior russian sniper put that bottle of vodka away into her sack.
SVD picked up the sack onto her back again and let out another soft chuckle.

"They really thought they could keep it hidden from me, haha~ wah-!"

Crack.
When the actually naughty girl of the night decided to come back to where she came from, she tripped with a pallet and almost fell. Luckily, she managed to stay on foot and not hurt herself. Although...

"Did... I step on something? Ah, I have no time for this."

Making sure not to leave anything behind, that fake Santa left and closed the door behind her.

In the middle of the room, resting in countless pieces... the broken glasses on which she had stepped on.

. . .

The next morning, G36 woke up as sad as she had went to sleep the last night. She knew the three other girls had tried her best for her, and she also saw them getting as depressed as she did when they were picking up all the remaining little pieces and putting them away in that teeny empty box, and so she decided she was not going to cry about it, in order not to worry them anymore; she has to be a kind and gentle girl too.
As she got out of the bed, she looked at that box on the bedside table. Normally, she would pick up her glasses and happily put them on to start a new day, but there was no way to do it that morning.

"..."

There was no point in doing so, but she still wanted to take a look at those fragments. No, no one was going to be able to repair them in such state, but leaving them just like that was just...

"Eh...?"

But, when she opened that otherwise completely unremarkable cardboard box, she found her glasses as good as new. Not a single scratch, not a single mark. They really looked as if she had never lost them. From the inside of the box, a faint scent of warm milk and bread came out.
She picked them up and put them on, and the brightest smile a child can show was immediately plastered on her face.

"Alright..."

Surely, they were going to get scolded because of their little adventure the last night. She was ready for that.
And, surely, the other three would open their eyes wide when they meet her eyes through those glasses. If they did, she already knew what she would say in response.

"The actual Santa did it, of course!"

- - -

Art: yiyiqiany

WarThunderNihon commission N°1 - The sisters atop the wall

A sole girl watches onto the horizon as the wind blows.
The trees allow themselves to be swayed from one side to the other, pretty much like the golden strands hanging from the girl's head.
A weapon in her hands, she sighs shortly, trying not to make much of a noise.
It's getting late already. Even the sun appears to be yawning, as it slowly yet surely begins diving down.
It's a quiet night. The girl takes a hand to the side of her head and squints her eyes.

"I wonder if-"

Click.
Then a mechanical, sliding noise.
The girl quickly turns to her right and frowns profusely, pouting and taking both her hands to her waist; the gun hangs from a sling.

"I told you not to do that!"
"Hm? Not to do what~?"
"Taking pictures! It's strictly forbidden. You shouldn't even have come with your camera to begin with."
"Eh? But I can't get away from my camera. It's part of me, you know?"
". . ."
"... n-no, really. It seems like it's linked to me as much as my gun is."
"What? Isn't that a bit troublesome?"
"It is, yes..."

There's a moment of silence, during which the wind does its best to make as much noise as posible, almost as if it was trying to dissipate that awkward feeling between the two.
The girl with the brightest hair is the one to speak up again.

"Still, don't take pictures while guarding, 41. We don't need our enemies to get their hands on sensitive information if you get captured."
"You hurt me. I wouldn't be so dumb as to leave visual registry of sensitive parts of the base~"
"Even if you..."

The girl with the camera in her hands, MP41, smiled, took the freshly taken picture and showed it to her partner, MP40. The latter sighed briefly as she saw it, promptly looking back into the other's eyes.

"So, about the link between you and your camera..."

. . .

Both girls resumed her patrol. Under her feet, a wide, tall wall. By one side of the wall, the base they ought to defend, and further beyond, a whole country to protect. By the other side, enemy territory.
It was a tranquil, cloudless night. They weren't reported of any suspicious activity nearby, and the radars hadn't picked anything either. The observers set atop of each tower that was built along the wall each few hundred meters hadn't seen anything remarkable either. Sure, it would be safe to say the girls could take it a bit easier for the night, but none of them were up for that kind of negligence.

"Why do you think that happened?"
"Don't you think it's obvious?"
"How is it obvious? It's a camera. All of us are linked with that that we use in combat, hence why T-Dolls are linked with their firearms, yet you-"
"I'm linked both with my gun and this camera, you know?"
"... I don't get it..."
"It took me a bit to get it too, but it's obvious once you realize what's happening. Information is a weapon too, probably the most destructive one, too. That's why, when I came here, the... world, or whatever it is, decided my 'weapons' were both my gun, and my camera. It's not what I was expecting, but I am fine with it."
"..."
"Did you get it now?"
"Yes, I did. It's just..."
"Hm?"

MP40 stops on her tracks. Her partner turns around to look at her with a questioning face.

"It's just..."

A smile she's trying not to let be seen takes form on MP40's face, while she faces towards the horizon in a useless attempt to hide it.

"There are girls out there with exceptional riggings. W-with cannons and stuff and you... you have a camera. It's already bad enough that us T-Dolls have to get by just with our guns but... a camera is..."
"..."
"Sorry."

41 doesn't look that mad, although it's clear she's not pleased with being laughed at. She appears to simply rub it out as she turns around again and keeps walking, yet her voice sounds.

"Maybe they didn't link you with anything else because they saw you were already too heavy-"
"S-so rude! I haven't g-... g-guh!"

But it was 40 the one who started, and since she's a mature girl she knows the correct thing to do is taking the blow and forget about it. She will be more careful next time.

. . .

"Oh! Speaking of the girls. Did you find a way to get in contact with the rest, 40?"
"It's 1936, I have no way to do that. Also remember we are not exactly friends here. I mean... I don't feel any kind of animosity towards any other T-Doll, but if some faction attacks Iron Blood and there are T-Dolls on their side, I wouldn't doubt returning fire."
"So cold..."
"I'm not cold, I don't want to fight my friends. But, things are the way they are..."
"Do you think they're having it easy?"
"..."

The darkness has already taken over all the spots that the reflectors atop the wall are not illuminating, and so MP40 is unable to look at anything even if she turns her head to the side. One way or another, she still smiles as if she could see her friends from G&K.

"Yes, I think they are fine. Even if we T-Dolls are the weakest among all those super strong girls, I think we are the most effective ones! And we know how to follow orders, too."
"If they are being treated as we are here in Iron Blood then we shouldn't have anything to worry about."
"Yes... yes, I think they will be fine."
"Even the most undisciplined ones?"
"Yes, even those. We were divided in fairly big nations, so none of them are really alone, right? A-ah, well..."
"Hm? What is it?"
"W-well I don't even know if all of us were brought here, but if that was the case then... maybe there are some strays..."
"O-oh, right. Like... those from South America, or..."
"Yes, precisely..."

Both of them couldn't help it but to show off some awkward smiles. Suddenly, maybe things didn't look that bright for every single T-Doll. Still, there was

nothing they could do about it.

"I'm sure they'll find the way home, one way or another!"

. . .

"Planes, tanks, ships, guns..."
"Did you say something?"

MP40 saw 41 messing with some pictures she took off from her bag, talking to herself and so she questioned. 40 could see there were various pictures of the many girls from Iron Blood they had met, some of them looked unaware of being photographed, and some of them straight up smiled to the camera.

"Mhm. I was just thinking about all that we've seen here. Look here, for example. The girl from this picture is apparently a... a plane. Maybe not exactly a plane, but her name is that of a plane and her rigging allows her to fight as if she were... I think. I'm not sure I got all of it."
"If I recall correctly, those girls are linked with her riggings the same way we are linked to our guns."
"Yes. Any hit taken by their rigging will also be felt by their core. Just like with our guns, and my camera."

40 nodded quietly, and asked 41 to let her see one of the pictures a bit closer.

"Planes, tanks, ships, guns... we are at clear disadvantage no matter how you put it."
"But we are still here. It's only natural, since there wouldn't be any infantry troops otherwise. Those tank or ship girls can surely do a big lot of damage, but they won't able to take an outpost by themselves. Much less doing it stealthily."
"How did we even end up here? It was not our conflict to begin with, it's all so... strange."
"Not our conflict, not our time, not even our... our... what was the word they used..."
"Timeline. All of us seem to exist in different worlds, that's why we have never seen nor heard about each other."

40 returned the picture, and the two of them kept on patrolling. 41 looked up at the sky, focusing specifically on some specially bright star while 40 looked down at the other side of the wall, never forgetting about the mission at hand. Out of nowhere, 41 chuckled.

"What is it this time?"
"I was just imagining what would it be like if we had plane, tank and ship girls at G&K. We would be extremely powerful, wouldn't we? No faction would be a problem to deal with."

"Haha... I'm sure it would be a little more complicated than that. If we had been that powerful from the beginning, then I'm sure our enemies would have also become really strong too. In the end, we would only be facing more destruction."
"Hum..."
"And imagine the costs! The amount of combustible needed to maintain such a huge infrastructure working would be massive. Where would we get the funds from?"
"Yeah... oh, speaking of which!"

MP41 looked at the other dead in the eye. Then, she looked to her sides, and down the wall by the allied side before coming back to her partner.

"What? What is it?"
"I was just..."
"There's no one around, you can tell me."
"... about the food we're given."
"Yes, what of it?"
"It's not that good."
"..."

The girl with the golden, bright hair sighed.

"I didn't find it that terrible. Nevertheless, remember you MUST eat it. We are still not sure how things work but we have corroborated we actually need both to sleep and to eat in order to keep functioning here. If you refuse to eat, you'll end up spending all your energy and you won't be able to move."
"What a pain..."
"And it's not only us, all of the girls have to eat too. I don't know who decided it, but we can only play along."
"... the other girls, they..."

MP41 smiled in a slightly smugly way. MP40 thought about telling her to wipe it off her face, but upon realizing what the other was going to say, she couldn't help it but to briefly smile too.

"It's quite weird, isn't it?"
"Diesel! I saw one of them drinking diesel from a bottle! And she looked like she REALLY liked it too!"
"I was a bit shocked too. I was following Kar to one of the hangars and saw a plane girl sipping on kerosene. Kar told me the girls linked to their riggings need to drink combustible in order to keep them working."
"That's taking it too far, hahaha!"
"Th-they can't help it. They will also run out of energy if they don't."
"I never thought I'd feel so happy about being underpowered, I don't want to drink any kind of oil."

40 let 41 giggle for a bit more, but then rushed her into focusing on their duty.
It was a boring night, a very boring night. Even the reliable MP40 secretly wanted to just sit down and relax, looking up at the sky and down at the trees, but she would never act so disrespectfully against her given orders.
Click.
Another sliding noise, and then the soft, cute sighing of contempt of the girl who just took a picture of the scenery.

"Do you think I'll be able to bring all these pictures home once we're back?"
"Why wouldn't you?"
"I don't know, everything here is weird. I wouldn't be that surprised if there was this unwritten rule of not bringing things to the past back to the future, or something like that."
"... even so, you should be able to keep your neural cloud intact. Couldn't the pictures be replicated based on that information even if you can't keep the original pictures?"
"I... I guess, but it wouldn't be the same. I want to keep these pictures."
"Then I don't know what to tell you..."

Click.
And the next picture shows MP40 with her mouth open, talking.
She frowns.

"That was very rude."
"I want to keep this one too~"

. . .

At least another hour of carefree talking went by.
As expected, absolutely nothing happened.
Those are the best nights, of course. Nothing's better for a sentinel than an extremely boring night, for it means there was no need to set off a single alarm.

"It's already time, isn't it?"
"Yes. This was, thankfully, yet another uneventful night."
"I wish all of our nights could be like this one."
"Impossible. We'll eventually get deployed, or we'll see ourselves returning fire from this very same wall. You ought to be ready for that, MP41."
"I know, I know..."

Both dolls saw themselves in front of a robust metallic door, embedded into one of the walls of one of the previously mentioned towers. MP40 threw a last glance towards the forest by her left and made a slightly worried face.

"... although, I wouldn't like any of those scenarios. This is truly a time when no one of us was even thought of, senselessly fighting is the last thing I want to do.

Much less if I also have to face friends. All of this might be nothing but a game, and so there might be not to much to worry about, but..."
"But it's a shame, I know. It's inviting; being in such a foreign time and place, I mean. It would both be way more fun, and a better experience to simply walk around, talk with the people and take all the pictures I wanted. But we still have a duty, even here."
"Yes..."

41 noticed 40's silence, and so leaned a bit towards her; hands on her back, just trying to take a peek at her expression.

"If we do have some time to spare..."

But 41 had to quickly back off as 40 turned around to see her, showing a rather lazy smile, holding that submachine gun in her clothed hands. It was dark, yet that smile was surely bright and provoked 41 into smiling too.

"If we do have some time to spare, I'll tell Kar we'd like to do some recon around town. Of course, it's still part of our duties so we'll commit dutifully to it and we'll avoid getting distracted and wasting time meaninglessly asking the residents about their lifestyle, or sightseeing..."
"40..."
"I just hope I'll be sharp enough to prevent you from taking any unneeded pictures behind my back."
"..."

Many ideas crossed through MP41's neural cloud. She even thought about hugging MP40, although it was quite evident that her partner was as interested as her about the world surrounding them. She refrained, and instead decided to smile almost as brightly as 40.

"I won't make any promises!"
"I know you won't."

Lightly chuckling, MP40 took a step forward and opened that door for both of them to walk in.

. . .

"Finally, a break."

MP41 stepped into that room with her aim set on that small fridge in the corner, from which she took a cold water bottle and drank straight from it, letting out a soft sigh afterwards.
MP40, on the other hand, calmly sat down before the desk, writing with perfect calligraphy something along the lines of 'nothing to report' in the registry

book.
The designated room to rest was not big. It had two beds, a fridge, two desks, a desk with a telephone on top of it, and nothing else deserving to be noted, all circled by some strong, gray stone walls. The were a total of three doors, two leading to each sides of the wall, and one leading to the stairs that would both lead to the top of the tower or to floor level.

"If you want to nap, now is the time. Another pair will be deployed to cover this section of the wall for the next two hours, so please rest."
"I might, but, 40, you..."
"It's fine, I'm not tired. Someone needs to stay awake in case something happens. I'll rest on our next stop."
"That's four hours from now."
"Yes. As I said, it's fine, please don't worry."
"Hm..."

MP41 sat down on one of the beds, doubtfully. She wouldn't be the one to reject the idea of taking a nice two-hours nap, but she wasn't that fond of the idea of MP40 not sleeping at all. A break was a break, and it was meant for they both to rest so they could stay focused during the following hours.

"Is something wrong?"
"Yes. What's the point of you staying awake? If the phone rings we will both wake up anyway, you should rest while you can. You said it before, right now we're not that different from humans, so we should take as much as we can. It would get really troublesome if you weren't in full shape in the middle of an urgency."

MP40 dropped her pen at 41's words, and then turned her head to see her.

"You... you're right, actually."
"Eh...?"

Both of them went silent.
MP40 was still processing the fact that she overlook such an obvious fact, and MP41 was still amazed that 40 had not realized such an evident thing: she's not tired now, but she will probably be in an hour or two.

"... guess I'm not as used as the idea as I thought. Hm, having the same needs as a human... under normal circumstances, I could fight almost normally until I get hit or something akin, but right now... if I don't eat and sleep properly, I might fall in the middle of a fight, leaving everyone else at a disadvantage..."
"Being a human must be such a pain."
"I think-"

But before MP40 could keep talking, the phone behind her ringed. The T-Doll frowned and quickly picked it up. MP41 watched in silence, and didn't speak up

until 40 muttered 'understood' and put the phone down.

"So? Who was it? What happened?"
"Get up."
"Why?"

MP40 stood up and made sure her clothes were properly fixed before looking back at 41.

"It was IWS-2000. We are to go back to the barracks."
"Huh? Why? Did something happen?"
"I was not told, I only know a different couple will come to replace us."
"That's... weird. IWS, you said?"
"Yes. I could also hear AUG's and MG42's voices behind her. Something like... a meeting might be in her plans."
"Oh... alright, time to go."
"Yes, please make sure you don't leave anything behind and let's move. Whatever it is, it should be important if we were freed from our guard duties in order to attend."
"An emergency?"
"Let's hope not. Come on, let's move."

Both T-Dolls headed to the door that would bring them to the floor. Nothing was certain, and almost nothing was exactly clear about what they were experiencing and what was going to happen to them both, but the two were more than ready to whatever difficulties they were to affront.

- - -

Art: https://twitter.com/chocolint/status/1134171954099892224

WarThunderNihon commission N°2 - Wolf's Den

The high moon shined brightly enough to make it hard to see the stars that, over the past millions of years, tend to gather around her as every single night goes on. Even the tall, lush forest wasn't capable of preventing all of the moonlight from ultimately reaching the grass.
No one took a look at the sky that night.
A single step echoed through the forest, sneaking around the trees until it got lost who knows where.
Of course, it's not that a single step was done, but of the hundreds or thousands of steps done by that person through that vast forest, this was the first one to actually make a noise. Such thing displeased the woman, and so she lifted her right foot and glanced down; there laid a tiny, now broken, stick.

'Damn it' the woman complained in her thoughts. It was not a big deal, just a cracking branch, but having come all the way there without even alerting the wildlife only to misstep being so close to her objective surely felt a bit frustrating.

The girl took a deep breath and looked up. Nothing but more forest could be seen, but she was sure this was the correct path, for she had all the info she needed right in her neural cloud, there was just not a realistic way in which she could get lost. If something, it was way more probable that the settlement she was looking for was just quite well hidden.
She resumed her walking, as silently as a cat.
While it's true that, given the peculiar setting in which she and her companions found themselves, she was devoid of all the useful technology that could have made her infiltration plans easier, she was still certain there was not much to worry about; their enemies were pretty much in the same situation.

It was all about being smarter than those by the other side.

"..."

Her solo mission was a rather simple albeit dangerous one: to sneak into the territory under Northern Parliament's direct control. The chosen base was a notoriously small yet apparently important settlement not far from the frontier. There, she was to try and find any documents that would shed some light on the current events. The Northern Parliament is strong, their forces are big in number and their area of operation is huge, it was a possibility that they had already

found out what's exactly transpiring around this war.
That was her mission, and her only tools were her cleverness and that M16A1 in her hands.
Reaching a small, dimly illuminated clearing, she stopped to think. The T-Doll placed a hand against the bole by her right and pursed her lips. Something was not right. She recalled seeing that clearing in the maps when they were devising the plan, and it was almost right next to the supposed settlement yet... no lights, no noises, no anything. Even if they were trying very hard not to be detected, being this close should be enough to at least-

Thump.

A deaf noise. The noise of someone punching a tree, or someone falling head first onto the ground, or someone throwing a punching bag against a wall. It came from somewhere by her left, and it didn't take the doll more than a second to raise her weapon and get ready to confront any pursuers.
No point in asking herself stupid questions, it was evident she had been detected. That woman wearing an eyepatch over her right eye didn't move a muscle, but she couldn't see anything strange either. Not down on the ground, not up on the trees. Even the branches and leaves were still, as it wasn't a particularly windy night.
Right when she had decided the best course of action was leaping towards the clearing, at least for the moment, she heard footsteps very, very close to her. Someone was running behind her, tracing the same path she had walked on just before. She was forced to leap into the clearing, her previous choice simply didn't matter anymore. Deep inside, the T-Doll knew that, if she didn't jump to her right, she would be killed right on the spot.

And so she did.

She landed on that clearing, the moonlight hit her face; she once again assumed a combat position, aiming that rifle of hers towards the place she had been just before. Nevertheless, before she could even realize there were no running footsteps anymore, her body went rigid.
M16 didn't need to turn around. She could **feel** it. Someone was behind her.

Someone, who outclassed all of her skills.

A hunter.

The Wolf had cornered her.

. . .

She knew her own way of handling things had been a tad different from her usual methods.

From the moment she realized that that intruder was completely alone, she should have either killed her or captured her without giving her any chances. But she didn't, she decided to observe for a while, and to... look deeper.
Not like she reprimanded herself because of it, for she deemed it necessary. And, if anything, she could only feel relief upon having used her advanced electronics capabilities to gaze as deep as she could into that intruder's neural cloud. That which she found, rendered her speechless. What was the meaning of it all? Inside there, she saw a world that was clearly the same she came from, but... it was also highly, tremendously different too. She saw a world where different decisions were taken; she saw a world where humanity's resolve wasn't strong enough to pull the weeds from the root.
But, no matter how deeper and deeper she looked, it felt like it never wasn't enough. Just peeking inside those pieces of data and memories wasn't enough to satiate her curiosity. Something better was needed. Something more substantial. She needed explanations, and she could only come up with one way of getting what she wanted.
Swiftly, she confused the intruder doing nothing else but running around her, using the trees as cover.
When that trespasser with the eyepatch became aware of the situation she was in, she had the mouth of a rifle aimed at the back of her head.

Behind the rifle, the Wolf awaited. With her colorful eyes opened and a mask covering the lower half of her face.

. . .

"... that was rather easy for you, wasn't it? Is that because you know this place too well, or are you just that good?"
"Turn around."

The word exchange was short-lived, transient.
M16 wasn't even ordered to drop her gun, which could only mean the other person was too dumb, or too confident. Either way, she complied to the order given by that muffled voice while voluntarily taking her right hand away from the grip of her gun.

"Ah, it's you..."

There was no gesturing response coming from AK-12. If something, she looked attentive. As if she had found a guest she wanted to sit down on the couch and ask her about all kind of different things. Her eyes remained open for a longer while, and a tiny smile was formed under that dark mask.

"... yes, it's me. So I wasn't being deceived by some kind of overly complex counter-measure, you and I do share a similar origin."
"You sound like-"

"Yes – I might sound a bit strange. Tell me, how much do you know about me?"

Not much more was needed for M16 to discern that *this* AK-12 was not **that** AK-12. At such fact, she slightly tilted her head to one side.

"I guess could say... I don't really know that much about **you**, but I don't know a single thing about *you*."
"..."

That girl with the pale hair released a very subtle chuckle, and closed her eyes.

"What a shame. I saw a rush of... very concerning information when I gazed into your neural cloud, and I was expecting you to tell me more about **that** me."
"You ran out of luck, I'm not the ideal person to provide you with that information."
"Yes, yes... it's truly a shame. Now, drop your weapon."
"Are you going to capture me?"
"No, I've seen enough to realize I couldn't extract any valuable data from you. You'd probably rather die out before breaking down and telling me anything I haven't already seen."
"... then?"

M16 complied. Her rifle landed a couple of meters behind her. It was not visible, but the smile under AK-12's mask got just barely wider.

"I just want to ask you some questions, think of it as a friendly conversation."
"What-?!"

The Northern Parliament's elite T-Doll dropped her rifle too, which landed, in the same fashion as M16's, some distance behind her. Before the firearm had bounced against the grass, AK-12 had already gapped towards the other woman, throwing an inhumanely fast turning kick at her left side. M16 was caught off-guard, but not enough as to take the whole hit in; the outer side of her left elbow took most of the damage.
As the Eagle Union's soldier recovered from the stagger, she heard the first question coming at her.

"You might have already guessed it, but while we share a similar setting, we don't seem to come from the same world. Tell me: How does a T-Doll live in your world?"

M16 doubted for a second, but returned that unseen smile soon after, taking a proper fighting stance.

"Putting it in very basic terms, we spend the days fighting against Sangvis Ferri, that's a-"

"Oh, I know what Sangvis is. Up to that point, our stories are the same. I think it diverges when..."

But AK-12 couldn't complete her statement, for she saw a quick punch coming straight for nose, at which she elegantly evaded it by stepping to the side. Another one came for her right cheek and she did the same, and she did the very same for the following one.

"Tell me: When exactly does it diverge?!"

That question was thrown by M16, just when she also stepped forward, getting really close to the other and attempting to hit her chin from below with her right elbow. Such attack was stopped by AK-12's left hand, which grabbed her elbow just centimeters away from its target.

"It's simple. When the Sangvis rebellion occurred, that very same day..."

For a brief moment, M16 could notice AK-12's eyes squinting.

"The Neo-Soviet Union blow them all to pieces with nuclear weaponry. Nothing was left."
"That's..."

The Russian T-Doll pushed M16 away by her elbow, but she wasn't expecting the American T-Doll to stretch her arm at the last moment, effectively grabbing and pulling from the first's mask and ripping it off. The mask bounced against the ground and then hit a tree, at which AK-12 simply rubbed her cheek, for now that soft smile of hers was visible. As if nothing had happened, she continued.

"... not too long after, the global powers decided the risk of a similar event happening again was too high; all and every T-Doll was dismantled, while their production was strictly forbidden."
"Not all of them."
"Certainly~, some of the elite were allowed to remain active, for our performance was, of course, exemplary."

The faint giggle she let out was abruptly cut short by another fist heading towards her head, yet this time she stylishly dived in, ducking as her right foot advanced past M16. The attack missed her by no more than three centimeters, and she delivered a precise elbow strike in the girl's nose. Before the girl with the eyepatch could retaliate, a fist landed on her right side, effectively pushing her away.

"Kuh-! Ah..."
"I presume our talk is not over yet~"
"It's your turn to ask."

M16's felt a bit of liquid running down her nose, and so calmly wiped it with the back of her hand. They were not that far off in terms of speed, even if the Russian was a bit faster. M16 realized this, but it still was terribly hard for her to keep up with her opponent. No matter if it was because of training or experience, AK-12 was a far superior fighter.

"How many T-Dolls are still active in your world? Are they welcomed, accepted by humanity?"

M16 knew what was coming. Even if it was too swift to fully appreciate the trajectory, that punch was surely about to hit her stomach. She was quick at using her left knee to deflect it.

"Oh."

And she was even quicker, noticing the surprise on AK-12's eyebrows, to throw a right uppercut which smoothly landed on her chin. The white-haired fighter stumbled back, returning a couple of steps back to her previous position.

"Alright..."
"Thousands. As for the second question, it's a bit complicated. The military and contractors accept T-Dolls as tools of war. It's always preferable to lose a machine in combat than having a man dying. The rest of humanity is... wary of T-Dolls. Some of them fear us, some of them despise us, some of them don't mind us. Now tell me-"

But she wasn't allowed to go any further, for she had to focus her whole attention to the open hand coming for her neck. She deflected that grab with her left forearm, and rapidly had to switch her focus to the right to prevent that punch from reaching her ribs. A frightening rush of attacks aimed for different zones of her body. M16 wasn't capable of refinedly evade each one like AK-12 did, so she had to block hit after hit. Amidst every attack, she managed to see AK-12's bright eyes fully opened.
Another open hand came for her, this time trying to forcefully get a hold of her skull. It was fast, too fast for her to raise her hand and deviate it. Given she had no other choice, the American did a sidestep to prevent a worse fate. Unknown to her, her actions had been previously calculated by the enemy.
AK-12 reverse-swept below M16's feet with her right leg even before she had landed both her soles. When 16 was still in the air, 12 presented a horrific crescent kick that 16 had no means to stop. The Russian's left shill impacted on the other's ribs and stomach, and the applied strength was so much that it sent her flying many meters away.
M16 bounced away as she coughed, promptly getting back on her feet while holding her ribs with a hand.

"... that kick broke something, although I'm not sure what..."

"I think I got too into it."

Not taking those beautiful eyes off of her, AK-12 got progressively closer.

"Who's your superior? Who's the one who sends you on your missions?"

The dark-haired android let out a short sigh; her turn had been skipped.

"That would be the commander, of course. Who else?"
"The commander..."

Both T-Dolls stood before each other, glaring into each other's gaze as if waiting for the other to attack first.

"What's your commander's name?"

But M16 chuckled at such a question. Slowly, inch by inch, she adopted her fighting stance once more.

"As if I would give away such valuable info that easily. Sorry, AK-12, but that's a question that will remain unanswered."
"I see... what a shame, indeed~."

A punch was thrown. It was, however, easily deflected.

AK-12 held that wrist and turned it around as she very slightly turned her body, letting M16 pass by with the sole momentum of her own attack. The doll in control placed her right hand behind the other's shoulder, and forced her whole body down to the ground.
Both of them went quiet, and nobody moved anymore.

"..."
"You..."
"I'm a single movement away from breaking off your whole arm."
"Ah... I know, I know. You're so good it almost feels like you're cheating."
"One last question, M16A1."

The girl whose body was being kept down smiled a bit, closing her eyes.

"Shoot. Just be sure it's something I'm actually willing to respond to."
"Is there any T-Doll back in Eagle Union who knows more than you about **that** me?"
"... yes, there's someone. You won't hear names coming from me, though."
"That's fine."

To her surprise, M16 was released. By the time she stood up and looked behind, AK-12 was already by the other side of the clearing. Her mask set against her

face, her rifle being held by her hands... and her eyes gracefully closed.

"Leave."
"Huh...? Is that fine with you?"
"I came here by myself, no one but you and I will ever know about this encounter."
"You're putting me in such a difficult spot. I can't just come up with an excuse for the failure of a mission I volunteered to carry on..."

M16 picked her rifle up and turned back to the clearing and, even if AK-12 wasn't to be seen anymore, her voice could still be heard.

"Just tell them security was too strong for you to pass it by, so you decided to turn back. That's not exactly a lie, is it?"

There was this faint scent of teasing in the Russian's voice, alike to that of a kid plotting to pull a prank on a friend.

"Then I'll need to explain why do I need my ribs to be repaired."
"I know you'll figure it out."
"It's easy for you to say that..."

But there was no response this time: AK-12 had already left.
M16A1 turned back and walked along the path back to Eagle Union's territory, thinking up of a way to justify her own failure.

. . .

The Wolf watched the intruder leave.

"This... this burning curiosity is truly something..."

A different world, where a different AK-12 had fought a different kind of war. What about the commander? It was also a different person? What should she do with that information?

"I need to know more; this is not a matter I could simply ignore. Commander, I wonder if..."

But she shook her head and sighed quietly. It was already time to return.

Before the trees could realize, the Wolf had already left.

- - -

Art: @Yummyalien1

Jurassic Weeb Commission N°1 - Bequem

"What about the losses?"
"The amount of destroyed bodies was at least 125% higher than what was expected. All the cores have been recovered, but we might need some time to provide all of them with a new body. In the meantime..."
"We will be reducing our active personnel to a 40%."
"Commander, if we do that, then..."
"We'll only be able to carry out the bare minimum of logistics and base defense. We'll be practically non-operational for a while."
"For how long?"
"Until at least 50% of the damaged dolls get a new body."
"This... will not be appreciated by the superiority."
"Surely not, but we have not much of a choice. A defeat in this state could very well mean the end of us all. We ought to lie down for some time."

The central table in the operations room is almost entirely covered by papers: maps, spreadsheets and notifications. On the nearby, smaller table that's by the other end of the room, rests a mug that has been refilled with coffee at least six times since the meeting began. The Commander is known for his habit of pushing his body to the limit, and this doesn't surprise anyone. The T-Doll accompanying him is still disapproval of this, but the situation at hands is too critical to talk about anything else.

"What does the scouts' report says?"
"It seems like our retreating forces weren't chased. There are no signs of enemy patrols trying to follow the traces, either. They also suffered heavy losses so it's only natural that they'd need a break too. Commander..."
"Yes?"

The silver-haired T-Doll shows a slightly worried face as she stares into her Commander's eyes, speaking in a soft voice that could soothe a raging lion.

"When are you taking a break?"

Returning the android's gaze, the Commander takes the last sip from his mug before leaving it on the table again.

"When all our problems are sorted out. If I can't at least get everything done, and every order issued, I might as well resign from the job. We have already too many

complications in our hands to worry about not sleeping enough."

He walks back to the center of the room and checks two different damage reports, each one written by a different squad participating on the previous battle. Such battle was actually a success, but the damage sustained made it almost feel like a defeat.

"I have to sit down and decide which logistics will remain active. I also need to reorganize pretty much every echelon to make up for the non-operative dolls. I must deploy scouts, too. Probably a small group of two or three to keep an eye on the enemy. If they somehow realize how beaten up we are and devise an attack plan, we need to know it as soon as possible in order to set up the defenses... or to evacuate, worst case scenario. Oh, and I can't forget about rechecking all the repair requisitions, it's not strange for some to get messed up when they are... that many. Hm, I'll also see personally how those are carried on. There's something I'm forgetting. That... that must be... ah, of course. How stupid. I'm forgetting about the reinforcements requisitions. We'll see if the nearby bases are capable of giving us a hand, lending us some T-Dolls we could put to use in order not to overload our own personal. I'll start with that one. Tokarev, could you please serve me more coffee?"
"You look ugly, Commander."

When the surprised Commander turns around to face her, the T-Doll is standing in front of him. She grabs his face with both her hands and softly pulls the skin on his cheekbones with her thumbs.

"Look at these eye bags. This is not a face you should show to your dolls, Commander."
"..."
"I've got everything noted down. I beg you to lie down at least for a couple of hours. We'll get everything done as soon as you wake up, yes?"
"... yes."

. . .

The Commander reluctantly retreats to his room, only irritated with himself for not having a body that could endure even more. There are many, truly many things to do. His mind revolves around all the orders he must give and all the papers he must sign. While everyone knows that this is his job, only he pushes himself to the limit in such a way.
However, his adjutant has a point: he won't be effective if he's not well-rested, and showing himself so exhausted to the T-Dolls will only worsen everyone's morale.
That's why he finds himself now in front of the door to his personal room, hand on the doorknob as he dismisses the last traces of resistance within him. He turns the knob with a sigh, and steps through the door.

"Ah, Commander! Finally~"

The sight on the other side is possibly the least expected.
His room is small, larger than one that would accommodate a single T-Doll but smaller than those that house two. Next to the lone window, partially open and shielded by curtains, lies a neatly made one-and-a-half bed. Curiously, considering he left in the morning without tidying anything up.
On one side, there's a bookshelf with books beside an opening in the wall leading to a tiny kitchen, and on the other side, there's a desk that has also been organized by someone other than him, next to a door leading to the bathroom.
However, what catches the eye the most is what's on the bed...

"It's not nice to keep a girl waiting, Commander. Especially if she's already in your room, waiting for you~"

The T-Doll sitting on the bed is dressed casually. Blue fabric shorts and a white t-shirt with inscriptions in German. Furthermore, she has already taken off her shoes, which wait beside the bed. Her bare legs dangle from the edge of the bed, and she sways them slowly as she looks at her Commander.

"UMP45, you're-"
"Hehe~"

There's a curious blush on the android's face, one that isn't really natural.
The Commander checks that no one in the hallways might have overheard their exchange before closing the door. Just two steps inside, he detects the faint scent of alcohol emanating from the girl on the bed. His expression twists into a somewhat uncomfortable smile.

"... were you drinking? You?"
"Is it that obvious? 9 brought some bottles of Eierlikör. I don't know where she got them, maybe borrowed from some base personnel, or from the kitchen."
"And you didn't scold her?"
"Should I have? Hehe~ I didn't plan on drinking much, but then G11 and 416 showed up and..."

The more he listens to the mysterious T-Doll before him, the more intense the shiver down his spine becomes.

"Now... now I'm exhausted, but I'll have to scold them later. And we'll need to replace those bottles of... Eierlikör? Where am I supposed to get that...?"
"Don't worry about those things, not right now~ Besides..."

The smile on UMP45's face twists slightly to the side as she tilts her head in the opposite direction, narrowing her eyes only slightly and leaning a few degrees forward.

"Look at yourself, Commander. You seem like someone who would explode if just another worry was placed upon you, no matter how insignificant..."

The Commander lowers his gaze, though not his head.

"Look at your dark circles, your weary shoulders, your hopeless expression..."

He doesn't respond, knowing he can't excuse his terrible state. After a few seconds of somewhat awkward silence, the brown-haired girl lets out a playful sigh, leaning back on the bed and placing both hands on it.

"You leave me no choice, Commander."
"What?"
"Come here."

With a calm gesture, she pats the space beside her on the bed, inviting him to sit. She doesn't say another word, not even as she meets his slightly confused gaze. The stressed Commander resigns himself to do as he's told and slowly takes his place, feeling a hand on the side of his head guiding him down. Along the way, the other side of his head meets a remarkably soft and warm sensation, rendering him speechless.

"It would be very unfortunate to die in battle because my Commander didn't rest enough when he should have, don't you think?"

He turns his head slightly to look up, where he meets the girl's face, now even redder than before but still wearing that confident smile.
Even so, he remains silent. He turns his face away from her once the warmth accumulates in his own cheeks. He never imagined the impact a situation like this could have on him, as all the remaining drive to work liquefies in this softness, while he finally notices how tired he truly is. His thighs and shoulders ache from stiffness; they've been hurting for a while, he just hadn't noticed.

"... does anyone know you're here, 45?"

"Hm? No, would it be a problem if they did~? G11 fell asleep right there, while 9 and 416 left before I finished what was left of the liquor. I think they went to the bar, though I'm not sure."

With that small assurance, the Commander closes his eyes and simply enjoys the soothing moment. The T-Doll notices, and her smile becomes just a bit more genuine.

"I want to ask you something, Commander. May I~?"
"Since when do you ask for permission for these things?"
"Let me be polite for once, haha~"

The Commander feels a hand gently resting on his head, which begins to calmly stroke his hair.

"Why do you go to such lengths to fulfill your duties, Commander? Everyone here works hard, but your case is... particularly interesting."

A roaring engine can be heard far, very far away. The doll tilts her head once again, gazing down at the Commander's head.

"You'd rather keep working than taking a break, no matter how broken down you are. Commander, could it be... that you're already so broken down, beyond repair, that you don't even notice it?"

The question is piercing.
The man in the room notices the lack of tact and subtlety, and the uncomfortably direct nature of the question. For a few seconds, he wonders if perhaps that was her intention, or if it was just a by-product of her personality.
Finally, he can speak.

"I'm not broken. I would say... I work so hard to avoid breaking down."
"Oh? How so?"
"It's what I learned growing up. I didn't have an easy childhood. The streets are tough for a kid alone; if I stopped fighting for a moment, maybe I wouldn't have anything to eat. I don't like when people say I'm hardened, a child doesn't get hardened, they just toughen up to avoid being hurt."

Once again, a distant engine hums, and he allows himself to sink a little further into the lap of the T-Doll who comforts him. The android's response is to stroke him a little more, in silence.

"I grew up, but I think I never stopped thinking like that kid. Maybe I transfer that same way of acting to my current role... maybe."

The girl's sharp voice softens somewhat, becoming calm and vaguely speaking as if addressing a child.

"You didn't know your parents?"
"Yes, I did. My father abandoned me, and my mother died shortly before."
"... must have been tough."
"Many years have passed, it's not something I think about often."
"Even so, Commander."

She begins to lazily play with his hair, winding one or two strands between her fingers as she gently slides most of her hand over his head. His feelings interpret it as a caress, perhaps carrying some compassion or pity.

"It doesn't change the fact that it must have been very hard for the little Commander to grow up on his own. We..."

During a brief silence, the android, whose sole focus at this moment is to calm her superior, leans forward and speaks almost directly into his ear. Her voice becomes a whisper, and the sweet tone it carries feels almost alien compared to what usually comes out of her mouth.

"We, who have lost what matters most to us, know better than anyone how hard it is to let things go."

The Commander considers probing, inquiring about the past of the T-Doll who intrigues him so much. However, he refrains. Perhaps out of fatigue or fear of an unexpected reaction, he doesn't let his eyes open and simply nestles into the comforting embrace that holds him.

"Your role here is different, Commander. They don't need you to do everything on your own, or to spend every ounce of your soul on a job in which, if you die, someone will be found who can do it almost as well as you."
"You're drunk, 45..."
"Hehe~"

For her, it's impossible to hide it, not at this point. Nor does it seem to bother her; in fact, that her state is so obvious to someone who knows her so well doesn't seem to faze her.

"Yes, I am. But does that make my words any less true, hmm?"

Once again, he finds himself at a loss for words; without anything to say. It's never easy to engage in conversation with her, and it's even harder now that she clearly holds the upper hand.
As if it were his final act of free will, he kicks off his shoes, pushing the heel of each with the tip of the other, and carefully turns on the bed. Thus, he ends up with his face directed towards UMP45's abdomen. Though he enjoys the sight before him, he closes his eyes again. He feels those gentle fingers on his head once more.

"Today was a bad day, wasn't it, Commander?"
"Yes..."
"Well, tomorrow you'll have a lot of work, so it'll probably be worse."

A very brief silence between them, and this time it's he who releases a short snort turned into laughter, soon accompanied by her soft laughter.

"You're not very good at comforting people."
"Really? Because you look very tranquil, Commander. And quite comforted, too~"

"That's..."
"Besides, you didn't let me finish."
"I feel like you're going to make it worse if I let you continue."
"Hehe~ not at all, Commander. You should listen to others more often."
"You're not the most... suitable person to say that."
"I wonder what you mean by that~"

UMP45's index finger traces a line along the Commander's jawline. Then it's the back of her hand that caresses his face, until her white fingertips finally stop at his nape, her thumb stroking the Commander's cheek. A nearly hypnotic sensation washes over him. The words that reach his ears become vague and confusing, while he can only think about how soft her legs are, and how skillful her fingers are at soothing him. The faint scent that may come from her body, her clothes, or her hair, the enticing tone of her voice, the affection with which she addresses him...

"Alright, continue..."
"We've known each other for quite some time, haven't we? And we've had many bad days together. Good days too, of course, although humans tend to remember the bad days more intensely. And, as it couldn't be otherwise, since that's the way you understand life, we were created with the same idea in mind..."
"..."
"Tomorrow will be a much worse day. You'll have a lot of work to do, more repair reports will come in, you'll have to request assistance, devise temporary defense plans, increase guard strictness while reducing personnel. Ah~ a truly horrible day awaits you, Commander~"
"..."
"But, if it's what you want, and it's what helps you stay on your feet, this same T-Doll will be here to stroke your hair and help you sleep peacefully."
"..."
"Hey, Commander..."
"..."
"Commander?"
"..."
"R-really? Did you just leave me talking to myself? I wonder how long..."

UMP45 sighs, albeit with a smile. She strokes the now sleeping Commander's head once more. Taking a few seconds, feeling secure enough to do so, she leans forward again and plants a short kiss on his head.

"Rest well, Commander..."

. . .

The next day promised to be as heavy, exhausting, and devastating as UMP45 had anticipated. The operations room was filled with documents and papers of

various kinds, and just seeing the stacks of sheets was enough to break anyone's spirit.
The adjutant moved back and forth, organizing each folder as best as she could to lighten the Commander's workload even just a little, while he watched from the doorway, low key wishing the ground would split open and swallow him whole. He bit his tongue to keep from letting out a sigh and scratched the back of his head.

"Tokarev, I'm going to get some coffee... we're going to need several liters. Do you want anything?"
"Ah- whatever is fine, Commander. I wouldn't mind having coffee with you."
"Alright. I'll be back in a moment."

He really needed to take his mind off those tons of work or he felt he would want to resign that very day. He turned around and closed the door, heading towards the cafeteria. He encountered some staff members as he walked, as well as some T-Dolls. Although everyone looked extremely busy, they all took a second to greet him, and curiously, it wasn't just two or three who told him he looked very good today.
Just before he arrived, he ran into another T-Doll.

"..."
"..."

UMP45 found him face to face, and a small, embarrassed silence blossomed between them. The android's cheeks reddened a bit more, probably remembering how much she had let herself go the day before due to the influence of alcohol. Despite that, a confident smile formed on her lips as she crossed her arms and closed an eye. His gaze firmly penetrating the Commander's eyes. That was, truly, every day's UMP45.

"Good morning, Commander. I genuinely hope your day is not a terrible one~"

- - -

Art: https://www.pixiv.net/en/artworks/72011474

Tora Commission N° 2 - The Frontlinedivers

The Dolls locked eyes with each other, alternatingly. Each of them wore a confident, nervous smile on their face, all more than willing to give their lives for the cause. A faint mechanical hum buzzed in the background as the loading shaft slowly raised them, inch by inch, from the underground to the main floor of the warehouse where the battle was to be fought. They were quite tightly packed together since the barrel they were in wasn't particularly large, which detracted some romance from the scene. This didn't seem to matter to them, as the pre-combat fire burned in the hearts of all four.
Clank. A dull noise echoed, and the loading shaft stopped.
One of them nodded, and the other three returned the gesture.
In unison, they all stood up and leaped out of the 'capsule' that deployed them onto the battlefield, releasing a resounding war cry.

"FOR FREEDOM!"

. . .

But this story begins one day earlier.

"For liberty!"
"For liberty!"

G36 and Orsis T-5000, one girl good and polite, and the other equally good but much more mischievous, were playing in the inner courtyard while another girl watched them a few meters away.

"It's boring to play like this..."

PP-19 complained, and Orsis, who was swinging a mop from side to side, hitting invisible enemies, stopped abruptly. The girl with glasses did the same, who until moments ago was shooting at those same enemies with the branch she had in her hands, which bore a slight resemblance to a firearm.

"Aren't you having fun?"

Orsis asked as she approached her friend.

"It's not the same. It doesn't have the same excitement!

G36 and Orsis exchanged glances. The latter didn't know what to say, so G36 intervened.

"We always play like this... p-plus, it's fun if you use your imagination a lot! Right now, Orsis and I are taking down those horrible giant bugs!"
"With a mop?"
"I-it's a Dragon Rod!"

The redhead interjected swiftly. One might expect her to be at least slightly annoyed by the white-haired girl's remark, but Orsis's eyes sparkled just from being able to name the weapon she was apparently using.

"That's not even in the game..."
"Join us, PP-19!"
"I already said! It won't feel the same! We need to think of something bigger! Think about it. The essence of the game lies in the thrill that-"
"The thrill that comes from fighting with pride and heroism against the scum that threaten our way of life!"

Once again, it was Orsis who felt it was her turn to speak.

"Yes, that's exactly it. Of course, playing that we're fighting those bugs or those robots is fun, but... it feels incomplete. We need more excitement!"

Orsis and G36 dropped their weapons and crossed their arms. PP-19 did the same, and the three girls lowered their heads, thinking with the hope that some idea would magically descend from the sky and settle upon them.

"Girls, I bring you just what you need."

The voice of the fourth girl caused the other three to look up towards the entrance to the courtyard. There, sitting sideways on her tricycle, that brown-haired girl smiled at them with a hint of complicity after hearing their heartfelt conversation. Her elegant white dress, the lower edges of which seemed vaguely dirty with a bit of soil, perhaps from her just-finished ride, created a certain dissonance with that playful, toothy smile.
PP-19 was the first to speak.

"HP-35, what-"
"No, no! Just listen to what I have to say!"

. . .

10 minutes later, in Orsis's room.

"And this is the situation we're facing."

G36, PP-19, and Orsis sat on the bed, while HP-35 stood by a whiteboard in front of the others, detailing what they were up against. Drawn with markers, there were certain scribbles and doodles illustrating a warehouse, a particular box, and many, many terrifying-looking insects.

"I'll repeat myself. A few hours ago, the Commander assigned me a mission near the warehouses. While I was completing it, I saw a huge flame coming out of one of them. Of course, it was terrifying at first, so I approached warehouse #710 to see what was happening, and what I found was even more terrifying!"

"To put it that way is cruel..."
"Vector was in there, with a mask covering her entire face and a flamethrower in her hands!"
"I didn't even know there was a flamethrower at the base."
"Neither did I! When I approached to ask her what she was doing, she told me-"

The brown-haired girl slammed her open palm loudly against the whiteboard, for added dramatic effect.

"The bugs have become a threat!"
"Bugs!"

The other three girls gasped in unison.

"Yes! There's a bug infestation in that warehouse that wants to get hold of a particular item. This box here is full of valuable supplies without which the base could NEVER survive!"

The polite G36 raised her hand, then asked gently.

"What are those supplies?"
"Those are..."

HP-35's voice dropped two or three tones as she closed her eyes and carefully measured her words.

"Chocolates and sweets."

A short but loud silence fell over them. Seconds later, the three girls on the bed nodded firmly.

"I knew I could count on you. Luckily for both you and me, I've already devised a plan to deal with those pests!"

HP-35 spent the next half hour drawing on the whiteboard, alternating between

raising and lowering her voice as she detailed how they would enter the warehouse, how they would position themselves once inside, where the box they needed to protect was located, and how the extraction would be carried out. A final drawing on the board showed the four girls proudly saluting in front of the box, fists clenched at chest level.

"Vector said she's going to do the same job tomorrow around 4:30 p.m. We have to act before she arrives, so this operation will begin at 3:30 p.m."
"What will be our weapons?"

PP-19 asked, glancing sideways at the other two Dolls on the bed.

"Unfortunately, we don't have the budget to supply ourselves with top-notch equipment. You can carry any weapon you think will be useful to deal with our enemies."

Orsis said nothing, but her eyes sparkled again at that declaration.

"That's all I had to tell you. The plan is in motion! Remember to be punctual. We'll meet in the underground of warehouse #710 tomorrow at 3:00 p.m. From there, we'll rise to the battlefield... lacking any way to fall from the sky. Enjoy this day of peace, defenders of democracy, because tomorrow we'll once again visit hell!"

All present raised their fists high in solemn dedication to what is right, and a new silence engulfed the entire room.

"..."

After a few seconds, Orsis slowly lowered her hand and tilted her head to the right. Her large blue eyes fell upon the Doll who had self-appointed herself as the captain of the operation.

"And... what do we do now?"
"Now? Well..."

There was almost a whole day left before the mission began, and it's not like the preparations would take them too long. The day's tasks had already been completed, and none of them had any pending tasks. Blank stares went back and forth, everyone waiting for someone to speak first.

"Um..."

All eyes landed on G36, who clasped her hands together in a silent applause, then declared with a smile.

"Why don't we bring all our laptops here and play for a while? Y-you know, to

think about tactics we could use tomorrow."
"..."

They all kept their mouths shut, but one by one, they returned the smile.
The captain let out a dry laugh and endorsed the idea.

"Well thought, G36! Let's all go get our computers. The bugs won't rest, so neither should we! Let's go!"
"Yeah!"

. . .

And so we returned to the starting point.
Each girl, after leaping from the barrel, rushed to take her respective position inside the warehouse.
Although only HP-35 had seen it before, they all knew which box to protect: the one in the south corner, the only one on that metal shelf.

"Look! The bugs have already started moving! No mercy! Helldivers, attack!"

Warehouse #710 was a large square. The Dolls ascended from the back of the room, so in front of them and to the sides, shelves were packed with boxes containing various supplies, and a row of palletized boxes in the center of the room ran from where they were to the entrance door on the other side of the room.
Behind them, of course, was the box to protect.
The chosen weaponry for each was vaguely predictable: Orsis held in her hands the mop previously baptized as the 'Dragon Rod,' G36 wielded a toy rifle that fired small, pointed plastic darts, HP-35 carried a water gun that curiously shot at VERY high pressure, and PP-19, who decided to go further, carried a PP-19 that fired PVC pellets at speeds very unsafe for a child.

"Orsis and I will take the front! G36 and PP-19, cover the box! Don't let any insect get close!"

Hundreds, if not thousands, of small bugs approached from all directions. On the ground, crawling between the shelves, walking on the walls and ceiling. Some of them even flew.

"Hya!"

Orsis struck one of them with her mop, bringing it down from the air to be crushed against the floor. Beside her, HP-35 fired short bursts with her water gun, which managed to finish off the insects instantly. While she was distracted by four agile cockroaches trying to sneak between the shelves, she felt a flying bug pass very close to her ear. This startled her for a second, but before she could

even turn to slap it, Orsis's mop struck it, causing it to crash against the wall.

"Hm!"

The Dolls exchanged glances and a smile of camaraderie, followed by a fraternal fist bump.
G36 and PP-19 had it somewhat easier. Thanks to their longer attack range, they could afford to carefully aim at the larger bugs to clear the way for the girls in the front to clean the area easily.

"G36, cover me!"
"Got it!"

PP-19 crouched down to reload her weapon. She discarded the empty magazine and inserted a new one before continuing to fire without getting up.

"Did you notice, G36?"
"Yeah, there are more and more big bugs coming."
"They're sending in the heavy hitters. They're going to slow us down."
"I'll take care of them, you worry about— wah! A beetle!"

Out of nowhere, a significantly larger flying insect approached close enough for them to hear the flapping of its wings. PP-19 jumped in front of G36 and, without hesitating for a moment, used her weapon as a baseball bat to hit the beetle and send it flying towards the girls in the front.

"Orsis!"

The redhead turned around and, with enviable speed, delivered a downward blow to the poor beetle using the stick of her mop, before finally crushing it with her boot.

"Heh!"

She gave them both a thumbs up and continued to eliminate creatures with her 'Dragon Rod'.
It wasn't a lie; with every passing second, beetles, large ants, and flying cockroaches became more common. The enemies had brought out the heavy artillery. Orsis and HP-35 had started to retreat, knowing they weren't enough to hold back all the heavy insects approaching.

PP-19 shouted.

"They're overwhelming us! We need to go on the offensive!"
"Yes, but don't lose sight of the objective! If a single bug gets into that box, we're done for!"

That was the captain's response.

PP-19 stepped forward with the others and opened fire with little regard for the amount of ammunition being spent.

"Orsis, now! Cut off their options!"
"Yes, ma'am!"

The girl with the mop ran towards one of the shelves on the right side and knocked it over, not caring that the supply boxes bounced off the floor. All that mattered was that one of the two insect access points had been interrupted, which should slow their advance, or...

"It's not working!"

G36 shouted.

"They're all coming in from the left side, they're going to overwhelm us!"
"Not yet!"

PP-19's shout encouraged them all to keep fighting, although none of them turned to see what she really meant by it.
The white-haired T-Doll muttered.

"I took this from OTs-39, it should give us the advantage!"
"What is it?"

HP-35 asked, curious to know what element could tip the scales in their favor at such a complicated moment in the battle. However, it was already too late to try to devise a plan on the fly; the flashbang was already in the air. Unfortunately, the noise it made when it hit the ground made them all turn.

BANG!

"Waah!"
"W-what?!"
"M-my eyes!"
"Wah! I can't hear anything!"

The four girls, now temporarily blind and deaf, shot and struck randomly, disoriented.

"Ugh-!"

Orsis's mop landed on HP-35's head. She fired a stream of water that hit PP-19's forehead. PP-19 started firing her pellet gun indiscriminately, and one of those pellets hit G36's nose tip, who, with tears in her eyes, also pulled the trigger of

her toy gun, causing one of the darts to hit Orsis's cheek.

"F-friendly fire!"

They all screamed at once.
HP-35 removed the mop from her face, shook her head vigorously until her vision returned to her, and decided to shout the final order.

"G-G36! That gray box in the corner! Use what's inside, it's our last resort!"
"Eh? Gray box?"

The blonde-haired girl scanned until she found the indicated container. She ran towards it and flung it open wide. Her eyes widened at the sight of the contents, and her hands trembled slightly as she laid them upon it. She hesitated and glanced in the direction of the captain.

"O-oh no..."

But the captain couldn't return her gaze, as she was screaming, covered in insects from head to toe, lying on the ground while Orsis tried to brush the bugs off her with the mop, and PP-19, with a slight expression of disgust, shot at the enemies on her body.
G36 swallowed hard and furrowed her brow; she was determined to act...

"Everyone! Get out of the way!"

Orsis and PP-19 almost fell to their knees upon seeing what G36 had in her hands; only HP-35 smiled with excitement and took the other two by the hands, running behind G36.

"Do it! Bring them hell!"
"FOR FREEDOM!!!!!"

G36 shouted with her sharp voice as she pressed the trigger of her newly acquired weapon: the flamethrower.
It didn't take even five seconds for the flames to spread across the shelves of the warehouse. The enemies fell dead one after another; the operation had taken a turn in their favor, but...

"That's it! Just like that, G36! Hahaha!"

HP-35 laughed, and Orsis also cheered on her glasses-wearing friend to keep on destroying all those horrible enemies of democracy. Although, PP-19...

"W-we're in trouble..."

She said as she saw all the boxes, except the target one, engulfed in flames,

although no one heard her.

. . .

It was 4:30 p.m., the time when Vector, tasked with eliminating, in a controlled manner, the insect threat, would take care of the main insect hotspots.
The four dolls stood in a line, their backs facing the blazing warehouse, while firefighters extinguished the flames.
The clothes of all four showed tears and minor burns, although their faces maintained a proud smile, and it was almost palpable how their gazes radiated satisfaction for a job well done.

"You know... you know you're going to be punished for this, right?"

Vector, with her usual calmness, let out that question without taking her eyes off the fire consuming the building. She wasn't going to say it, but those flames were beautiful.

"Yes, we know."

Said HP-35, and then she continued.

"But a scolding won't break our spirit! And that's because-!"

She gestured to G36 with an open palm. The girl in the maid outfit had her glasses askew and her hair disheveled, and in her hands, she carried the long-awaited box of sweets and chocolates, intact and without a scratch.

"The mission was a success!"

G36's voice swelled the chests of the other three, but it made Vector sigh.

"You burned down an entire warehouse. Do you have any idea how much money it will cost to replace all of that?"
"What does money matter when it comes to defending our way of life?"
"Orsis is right! Not only did we secure the objective, but we also wiped out thousands of those awful bugs! Look, the whole building is burning! If you think about it, it's like..."

HP-35 gave a conspiratorial wink to PP-19, who finished the sentence with complete conviction.

"Like we liberated the entire planet after eliminating all the threats!"

"Yay!" they all shouted at once, prompting Vector to look up at the sky and utter an "Oh..."

"Of course, it's all about that game, I see now..."

She stroked her chin and, after pondering it for a moment, she approached the box that G36 was holding, opened it, and then handed a chocolate bar to each girl.

"You're going to be punished anyway, but don't tell anyone I gave you these. Be more careful next time."

The girls accepted the reward, although PP-19 felt the need to ask.

"Why?"
"..."

Vector took a few seconds before responding. She glanced back at the blazing building and smiled for a moment before speaking again.

"Because that was a really good fire. That's all."

. . .

They were scolded.
They were also punished, and for a good couple of weeks, they couldn't use their laptops to play. But it didn't affect them too much.
They had all had their baptism by fire, and they had faced danger firsthand.
Every time they saw each other in the hallways, they smiled and greeted each other, with a closed fist at chest height.
The Dolls had become Helldivers.

WarThunderNihon Commission N°3 - Still, still, still

His eyes felt so heavy he could swear they'd fall out at any moment. The Commander was seated on one of those long, metallic benches that ran from end to end in the back of the cargo truck. With his back against the inner side panel and his head resting on the top railing, he gazed at the night sky without any hope of catching even a little sleep.

"Commander..."

On the opposite side, in the front seat, a T-Doll watched him with a noticeable yet slight expression of concern; it was understandable since she felt her superior might collapse at any moment.

"Yes, IWS?"

He spoke without moving. The red beret, as usual and obligatory, had been stashed inside the gray briefcase strapped under the seat.

"You look... tired. Don't you want to take advantage of the trip to get some rest? We won't reach our destination for at least another four hours, so..."

He tilted his head to the side, vaguely looking in the direction of his subordinate without much effort. The bags under his eyes made it clear that no one wanted to take a break more than he did. The T-Doll, on her part, showed a slight expression of pity.

"I've been trying to sleep for days. If I couldn't do it lying comfortably in my bed, I'm even less likely to manage it in a moving truck."

What saddened the T-Doll the most was hearing those words of discouragement contrasted with those tired eyes that longed for nothing more than a good, long, and well-deserved rest. They looked into each other's eyes for a few seconds until the subordinate brought a hand to her chin and slightly averted her gaze to the side, lowering her eyelids a bit.

"... that can't be right, by any means... maybe if-"

Her words were cut short by the noise the vehicle made as it hit a pothole in the road, to which the Commander raised an eyebrow with an expression that could be read as 'see? That's what I mean.'
However, it was those airs of despair that bothered IWS and made her frown a bit. In front of the Commander's indistinct gaze, she raised her voice slightly.

"We're going to make you sleep, Commander. One way or another."

. . .

"First things first. It's not a cold night, but nobody sleeps well without a blanket. Luckily, I have a fine cover in my backpack, so..."

Though the Commander looked at her from behind, she seemed more to be talking to herself. Squatting in a corner of the truck bed, she rummaged through the contents of her bulky gray backpack. Several items were taken out and carefully placed aside: ammunition, water bottles, notebooks, and pencils, among others.

"Here it is!"

A thin, carefully folded pink blanket. IWS nodded proudly to herself and slowly turned to look at her superior, with a small smile that only someone who knows they're doing a good job would show.

"Commander, please lie down. I have the solution to your sleep problems!"

He knew it wouldn't be that easy. If it were, he wouldn't be in the situation he was in. Still, he decided to ignore his own complaints and forbade himself even to sigh. Following the directions of the Doll who seemed so worried, the Commander lay on his back on the floor of the truck bed, thinking at least the view of the stars was peaceful. His field of vision was soon filled with the delicate face of his subordinate.

"If you allow me..."

She said, before spreading the blanket over him. She covered him from feet to shoulders, without removing that victorious smile from her face, and then sat cross-legged beside him, looking at his face.

"How is it? Do you feel like you could fall asleep at any moment? Do you think you could dream something pleasant if you close your eyes for a moment?"

Her subtle and almost contained enthusiasm was, undoubtedly, quite charming, which is why the Commander didn't say a word and closed his eyes.
No, he wasn't going to fall asleep. However, a powerful relaxing effect took over his senses, making him sigh contentedly.

"It smells... nice, it smells very nice. It's..."

He took the blanket with his right hand and brought it to his nose.
It was a sweet and fresh scent. He had no idea what had been used to scent the blanket in such a way, but, even though he wasn't going to fall asleep, he knew he could at least spend a much more pleasant time just by enjoying that fragrance.

. . .

About five minutes passed without either of them saying anything. The Doll kept her eyes fixed on her commander the entire time. Finally, losing patience, she spoke in a soft tone that was answered with a monotonous voice.

"Commander, are you asleep?"
"No, I'm not."
"U-uh..."

The first attempt had been a failure, and IWS's expression clearly showed her sadness for not having considered all the factors that might prevent her beloved commander from sleeping well.
He noticed and couldn't help but feel a bit guilty seeing those sad eyes. He immediately spoke again.

"Of course, I couldn't fall asleep like this, IWS. The truck makes a lot of noise, so much that it's impossible for me to relax. I told you before, if I couldn't..."

But he had to cut himself off because he detected a fleeting sparkle in IWS's eyes, which had regained much of their usual beauty. The girl smiled once more and brought a hand to her chin.

"IWS...?"
"No problem, Commander. I have the perfect solution. Of course, how silly of me! No one could rest with so much noise under their head. Luckily... yes, I think I brought it, permit me..."

And, with her voice fading behind him, the white-haired T-Doll crawled back to her backpack.

"I didn't plan to bring them because I didn't think I'd need them, but I also didn't feel right leaving them gathering dust in my room. Hm! It's a relief, Commander. There's no problem too big that I can't solve when I set my mind to it!"

She sounded strangely suspicious. From his position, turning his head a bit, he could only see IWS's backside wiggling as she rummaged through the bag. Finally, after a few seconds, she let out a quiet exclamation as she turned around with a

smile on her face and a pair of headband headphones in her right hand.

"Those are..."
"Noise-cancelling, Commander! TMP gave them to me because she got a new pair. Fortune smiles upon us tonight!"

She didn't seem to understand what the problem was or why the Commander showed that uncomfortable smile, nor did she worry too much about it. Inside, she just wanted to be useful to her boss. She approached him from behind and once again said, "If you allow me..." before placing those headphones on his head, which featured adorable black and green cat ears.

"There! Now there won't be any noise to keep you from sleeping. Please rest, Commander."

. . .

One thing was certain: the headphones worked perfectly. Since they had been put on, no noise disturbed the Commander. However, it was evident that this alone wasn't enough to send him to sleep.
Another five minutes later, the Commander opened his eyes with the sole intention of looking at the night sky once more.

"Ah..."

He didn't think this would break IWS's heart, who was silently celebrating having made her exhausted commander sleep. When their gazes met once again, he quickly closed his eyes to pretend he was asleep, but it was too late; he could already hear that stifled sigh of disappointment escape from the lips of the T-Doll who was giving her all.

"S-something else is missing, IWS. It's the most obvious thing, don't you think?"

IWS's eyes lit up once more, though this time she didn't smile. What was missing? What element was she not considering? The Commander was already covered, the noise wasn't bothering him, he had enough space to stretch out, and...

"A-ah! Of course! Commander, you don't have a pillow to rest your head on! I'll fix it in an instant."

IWS made a gesture to fetch her backpack but stopped immediately. She made a somewhat bitter expression that surprised the man lying on the floor a bit, and then she decided to check the bag again.

"No..."
"IWS?"
"I-I don't have a pillow, Commander. I also don't have anything that could be used

as one. I didn't plan to sleep on the way, and I didn't foresee this happening. Oh no..."
"Hm... you see? It was impossible from the start. Let's leave it at that, IWS. I can endure a trip like this. Once we're at the base, I'll lock myself in my room and with a bit of luck..."
"No."

He had started to get up, straightening his torso and placing a hand on the floor. He was about to turn the upper half of his body to see IWS, but her hands on his shoulders stopped him.

"Commander, I'll be your pillow!"

Before the tired man could react, his head was gently guided back down, but this time a soft texture prevented his neck from resting against the hard floor of the truck bed.

". . ."

He looked up and found the blushing face of IWS, who was staring intently at an undetermined point in space, trying not to let her nervousness show through her trembling.
There was no doubt that if IWS lacked anything, it was not determination. He was going to respect that, so he decided to relax as much as possible; he closed his eyes, dispelled all the tension in his body, and focused on enjoying the softness offered by the type of pillow every man dreams of.
'I'll be your pillow,' she had said. It was almost unthinkable to hear that T-Doll say something like that one day. If anything, it only demonstrated how much she truly wanted to provide comfort and support to her commander. It was, certainly, very charming in a way. He smiled a little, thinking it might not be a bad idea to try to give her the satisfaction. One more time, he could try to fall asleep. But...

"IWS."
"Y-yes, Commander?"
"Your legs."
"Y-yes, what's wrong with them? Oh, don't tell me you're uncomfortable..."
"Your legs are shaking too much. I can't sleep like this."
"A-ah, that... it's just that, being like this is a bit... embarrassing."
"Hm... I see... IWS, can I propose something?"
"Of course, Commander. Do you know what you need to sleep comfortably?"
"It's..."

. . .

IWS didn't know how to put into words that the idea proposed by her superior was even more embarrassing than what she had offered. However, she remained

calm. Using all her effort, she stayed still, controlling her smallest movements. She could only look upwards, not wanting to cause any discomfort to the man whose head rested on her abdomen. Despite her efforts, she couldn't dispel the bright blush on her cheeks.

"C-Commander, t-this is..."
"I think this will work, IWS."
"E-eh? Really?"

It was both a relief and a torment for her; she would manage to calm her commander's anxiety but wouldn't be able to calm herself all night.
The doll was lying lengthwise in the truck bed, and a bit lower, at about a 45-degree angle, rested the commander. She felt the nape of his neck on her stomach, right at the height of her navel, while he comfortably put his hands in his pockets.

"Yes, really. You're probably still trembling, but it's not as noticeable like this. Besides..."
"B-besides?"
"It's soft. This pillow is much better."
"..."

There was nothing to object. The android frowned, closed her eyes, and breathed heavily, charging herself with nothing but absolute determination. It was a small price to pay to finally see her precious commander resting. Yes, she had to endure it; it was not the end of the world at all.

"O-okay! Rest, Commander! I won't move from here until we reach our destination."
"Ah, what a relief... thank you, IWS. I'll repay you somehow... later..."
"There's no need, Commander! T-this is just... p-part of my responsibilities, so..."
"..."
"Commander...?"

She couldn't see his face. Both because her position didn't allow it and because if she moved, she might wake him up, assuming he had fallen asleep. Instead, and still with doubts in her chest, she brought one of her hands to him, very gently resting it on his head and slowly, very slowly, stroking his hair.

"Did you... fall asleep?"
"No, not yet."
"Ah-"

Regret was immediate, and she was about to remove her hand until he spoke again.

"But almost there. Can you keep doing that?"
"'That?' Oh, sure, s-sure..."
"Perfect..."

With the same gentle touch, IWS resumed the calm and slow movements of her hand. Though she couldn't fully understand why, it not only helped the commander relax but also made her feel less tense. She sensed the strands of the man's hair resting on her abdomen slipping effortlessly through her fingers. Her cheeks warmed once more, but this time, the feeling was welcomed, bringing a small smile to her face.
Time flowed on its own while they remained like this, and many minutes later, she asked in a sweet voice, without taking her eyes off the stars:

"Commander, are you asleep now?"

There was no vocal response, only the natural and slow breathing of the tired man who had finally managed to fall asleep.
To avoid disturbing her superior's long-awaited sleep, IWS stifled a small laugh and closed her eyes, voluntarily entering the world of dreams herself.

. . .

That was the scene encountered by the Doll assigned to receive the commander at the mobile base where the truck stopped. The driver and his companion, wisely, vanished without a trace after peeking into the truck bed and seeing the peaceful scene illuminated by the just-rising sun.

"Commander, and you too..."

The elegant and petite T-Doll looked at them both with a hint of reproach. Mainly, of course, at IWS. She could forgive the commander for falling asleep; she knew he hadn't been sleeping well, but IWS's situation was entirely different. Climbing into the truck, she approached very slowly to avoid making any noise and crouched next to the white-haired girl to whisper.

"IWS, wake up."
"Hmn..."
"Wake up!"
"Huh?!"

Upon opening her eyes, she found herself face-to-face with HP-35, who wore an almost malicious smile. It took a few seconds for her to understand why, but after moving her fingers slightly and still feeling her commander's hair, everything made sense.

"I-I can... I-I can explain—!"

"Shh! You'll wake him up!"

The brown-haired girl brought her index finger to her lips to shush the other.

"I'm going to leave quietly. When the Commander wakes up, bring him to me. And you... we'll talk later about maintaining etiquette at work."

After uttering those vaguely threatening words, HP-35 climbed down from the truck bed almost without causing any unnecessary movements and, with her characteristic grace, disappeared into the base's interior under IWS's trembling gaze.

"U-Uhm... Commander..."

IWS's fingers resumed stroking her superior's head. Slowly and tenderly, she ruffled the hair of the man who was blissfully unaware of the lecture awaiting the T-Doll who had given her all to ensure he got the rest he so desperately needed.

"Please, sleep as much as you can. It will be best for both of us..."

. . .

From that night on, IWS became the permanently assigned T-Doll to accompany the Commander whenever he needs to travel far away by land, although only three people know the reason.

"Quickly, IWS. What took you so long? We should have left about ten minutes ago."
"My sincerest apologies, Commander. It's just..."

Taking a seat across from her commander on the other side of the truck bed, IWS set her backpack aside. She looked around, lowered her voice, and let out a smile full of complicity.

"I got some smaller headphones, and these don't have cat ears."

- - -

Art: @RizkT511

Tora Commission N° 3 - A single candle

"I just want to be sure we've got authorization to do this. The last thing we need is... another scolding."

Five young girls sat around a round table, four of them focused on the one who had spoken first. That girl had short, chestnut hair and striking turquoise eyes. Her sleeveless white dress made her a picture of elegance... if not for the faint traces of dirt on its hem.
The other girls nodded in silence at HP-35's declaration, though G36 resisted the urge to point out that of nearly all their reprimands, 35 was the usual cause.
The girl immediately to her right was next to speak. As she raised her chin, her white pigtails swayed softly.

"We could say we *almost* have express permission from the commander!"
"Almost?"
"That's right. We've got someone to let him know we wanted to do something special for the day, right?"
"Huh...? Who was...?"

G36 raised her voice slightly, and it was then that the quietest of the five finally looked up from the table and spoke up.

"That was me."
"Ah, Thunder. Do we have permission? We won't get in trouble, right?"
"We have half the permission."

G36, HP-35, and MP40, the last of the girls, exchanged glances until the latter decided to press the matter.

"What do you mean by that, exactly?"
"The commander is allowing us to do 'something special' for Orsis tomorrow..."
"But...?"

The long-haired, blue-haired girl averted her gaze, searching for an ally in Five-seveN, who, in a cheerful tone, tried to ease the doubts in the group.

"But we didn't exactly tell him what we're planning~"
"That... that sounds bad. That'll get us in trouble."
"Don't worry, 35. I'll make sure to convince the commander that a surprise party

is a fantastic idea!"
"But, 57..."
"He'll agree the moment he hears it directly from me!"
"How are we supposed to throw a party in the middle of tomorrow's exercise?"

MP40 thought this question might make Five-seveN reconsider the plan, but to everyone's surprise (except Thunder), the smile on the white-haired girl's face only grew.

"The exercise will be the surprise party! Think about it—Orsis has no idea what day tomorrow is. It's the perfect chance to surprise her! I know the commander will let us have a little fun! We'll have games, hold shooting contests, snack on treats, and there'll be..."

Five-seveN's words trailed off as HP-35 turned to Thunder.

"I'm not opposed to the idea. If we really convince the commander, it could be an amazing party. But... do you think we can pull it off? I mean, we'd basically be ignoring the exercise, along with all the scheduled activities..."
"Yes, we can."
"How are you so sure?"

Thunder met her gaze with the faintest hint of a smile, laced with a touch of certainty. She seemed so secure, for some reason, as if there was not a single chance that things couldn't go the way she wanted them to.

"He put his hand on my head when he answered."
"..."

The dolls each reacted differently to this remark, and even a few girls nearby turned their heads and snickered at those words.
Eventually, Five-seveN's lengthy speech faded into the general hum of the bustling cafeteria.

. . .

By mid-morning the following day, the same group of T-Dolls gathered inside a high-ceilinged tent. They stood in a semicircle, one girl at the forefront, the focus of attention.

"So... we didn't get permission..."
"T-technically, we did. It's just..."

Five-seveN took a breath, preparing to explain the situation to her friends. Only they were inside the tent, surrounded by tables and chairs adorned with simple decorations, gifts, and scattered snacks. Overhead, a large banner stretched across

the room, declaring, "Happy Birthday, Orsis!" In one corner, all the team's weapons lay neatly stacked.

"I... I didn't get a chance to talk to the commander yesterday. Every time I saw him and tried to get his attention, he hurried off. Ugh..."

The white-haired girl slumped her shoulders in resignation.

"I should've guessed the day before an exercise would be busy for him..."
"What's our current situation?"

HP-35 posed the question to the group, intent on finding a solution, and MP40 took the lead in replying.

"Let's see... we were ordered to await the start of the exercise. So, until that happens, we decided to keep Orsis busy. Right now, she's out finding a good spot to practice with her rifle."
"Where'd she go?"
"She was heading up that small hill to the east. It should take her around twenty minutes up and another twenty down, though..."

MP40 placed a hand on her chin, looking somewhat uneasy.

"Knowing Orsis, she might be back in less than half an hour..."
"What do we do now?"
"Hm... this might be now or never. We should talk to the commander for his explicit permission to skip the exercise, but we need to do it before activities start. At the same time, someone has to keep Orsis away from here."
"Who could...?"

G36 was about to volunteer, but a voice from outside made all the girls jump.

"Heeeey! Girls! You're in here, right?"
"Orsis!"
"She came back in just twenty minutes—we underestimated her!"
"I-I'll take care of it!"

With a burst of resolve and courage, G36 dashed out of the tent and bumped into Orsis, who greeted her with a smile.

"Ah, G36! The others are inside, right? I heard you talking. I found a great spot I can use later~"

Orsis started toward the tent, but G36 held her arm, making her turn with a surprised expression.

"G36...?"

The two girls locked eyes. Behind Orsis stood the tent; behind G36, the ascending path to a small hill. If seen from above, one would notice they were in an expansive, open field, with rolling slopes and dips connected by flat stretches and occasional wooded patches. The rest of the teams were scattered across the area, covering a considerable portion of the territory.

"I-I want to find a good spot for myself too! Would you help me? You've... you've got a better eye for these things, and..."

It was clear Orsis found the rush of words from G36's mouth strange, but she didn't dwell on it. With a bright smile, she nodded and hopped away.

"Of course! Actually, I found the perfect place for you, G36! It's this way—follow me!"

G36 sighed with relief as she watched the redhead walk off. She glanced back at the tent for a few seconds, unsure of her words.

"I'll keep her busy. T-take care of the rest!"

The silence from the tent was answer enough, and quickly, the small blonde ran after her best friend.

. . .

"This is where you picked to settle in, Orsis...?"
"Yes! Isn't it awesome?!"
"It's... it's a bush."
"Mhm! The trees block the sun, and this bush is perfect for staying hidden as long as I need!"

G36 glanced around. They weren't exactly near the mountain's peak but rather halfway up. The spot didn't seem bad, yet the blonde let a question slip, purely out of curiosity.

"And... do you know what sort of activity the commander has planned for us?"
"Well...!"

The two girls fell silent, and soon the redhead placed a hand on her chin.

"Hm... not really. But I'm sure I can turn this into my sniper's nest when the time comes."
"R-right..."
"And you, G36!"

The little T-Doll, startled by her friend's enthusiasm, looked up as she pointed a finger her way.

"M-me?!"
"You'll be my spotter! It's perfect. There's enough space for both of us, and I'm not very good at close-range defense... but you, G36, are the best at keeping me safe!"
"M-maybe HP-35 or MP40 would be better. Besides, I—!"
"Hm...? You don't want to?"

The sudden disappointment in Orsis's tone made G36 raise both hands in denial.

"It's not that! Of course I want to. It's just that—"
"Then it's settled! We'll be an unstoppable duo, G36! Together, we'll dispense justice wherever evil dares to lurk!"

Before G36 could clarify that, firstly, this was merely a training exercise and, secondly, they were never going to receive a convenient order like "dispense justice," Orsis pulled her into a powerful hug, lifting her a few inches off the ground. All G36 could do was sigh and laugh in surrender.

"Ha-hahaha... alright, alright, I'll be your spotter..."
"It's official! We'll have each other's backs! Ah, but... we should let the others know. Well, not really *ask* them—more like inform them of our decision. It'd be a hassle to explain it all in the middle of combat."
"Y-yes, of course... it's just..."

G36 watched as her friend dashed down the mountain, hopping over rocks and bushes. She couldn't help but smile, though realization soon struck her like a heavy weight.

"W-wait! Don't go back to the tent!"

But it was too late; Orsis was already too far to hear her, and the most adorable member of the team had to chase after the redhead, tripping a few times along the way.

"W-wah!"

After the third fall, she had to pause for a moment.

"A-ah! M-my... my glasses..."

She fumbled around in the leaves and rocks, her fingers finally brushing the familiar metal frame. After cleaning them, she put them back on, only to realize that Orsis was nowhere in sight.

"O-oh no, I won't catch her..."

. . .

When Orsis entered the tent, she froze, taking in the decorations her friends had prepared. None of them were there, presumably off searching for the commander or something. She wandered slowly among the tables, admiring the snacks and presents, eventually stopping to read the large banner celebrating her date of manufacture. To confirm, she checked her personal data for basic information, and there it was—a fact she had never considered: today marked the anniversary of her activation. In other words, it was her birthday.
A deep surge of emotion welled up in her chest, and she almost shouted with joy right there. She'd never celebrated something like this, and the thought that her friends had gone to such trouble just for her filled her with happiness. She also realized something crucial: this was supposed to be a surprise party, which was why G36 had kept her away from the tent. An internal conflict stirred within her. Lying was wrong, and a righteous hero should never stoop to something so underhanded, especially with her companions. But... perhaps this was an exception worth making. She felt a little guilty for discovering the secret early, and the thought of G36 and the others working so hard, only for her to spoil the surprise... made her feel terrible.
Taking a deep breath to contain her smile, Orsis left the tent and sat down on a nearby rock, reviewing her PDA as she waited for G36 to catch up.

. . .

"S-so..."
"Hm..."

Five-seveN's eyes were misty, and she avoided HP-35's questions, fearing she'd break down and cry. MP40 approached from behind, hugging her gently and stroking her hair.

"There, there. We're following orders, and I'm sure there's a good reason for all of this."
"B-but..."
"Shh, no buts..."

Despite everything, MP40's voice was honest, as firm as it was gentle.

In front of the other two stood HP-35 and Thunder, exchanging glances. The four girls were outside a large tent, from which senior T-Dolls occasionally entered and exited without really paying much attention to them. Some of them looked like they were in a rush, while others kept talking listening to whatever orders were being issued through their communications devices.

"We didn't get permission."
"..."
"This... this is a huge problem. We had everything set up, we were so sure..."
"..."

"What's on your mind, Thunder?"
"..."

The blue-haired girl simply pouted, looking away with clear frustration burning in her eyes.

"I can't believe it. After... patting me on the head and everything..."
"Ah..."

HP-35 realized where this conversation was headed and sighed in frustration.

"What exactly did the commander say to you, 57?"
"He said... he said he couldn't afford to let us drift off aimlessly. Not now..."
"And why was that?"
"Because something unexpected might happen. He wouldn't tell me anything else, just... just to stay alert on the radio and..."

MP40 noticed Five-seveN's voice starting to break and quickly resumed comforting her with gentle strokes, doing her best to bring the girl back to peace.

"That's enough. We get it..."
"So... what do we do now?" asked HP-35, hoping for a response from the one girl who still seemed willing to talk.
"Hm... I don't know. We should probably take everything down and... maybe throw her a simpler party back at the base. It won't be the same, but at this point..."

HP-35 glanced at Thunder again, but the girl showed no interest in participating in the discussion. She scratched her head and nodded.

"Alright, there's no other choice..."
"Let's head back. If we keep Orsis from seeing the decorations, we can at least preserve some of the surprise."

No one objected. About three minutes later, as they headed back to the tent, HP-35 suddenly stopped, surprising the others. Bringing her hand to her earpiece, she nodded a few times.

"Almost... almost all of us are together. Only Orsis and G36 are missing. Ah, we have..."

The others exchanged glances, and Five-seveN spoke up in a slightly louder voice.

"Is it time for the exercise to start?"
"Wait—ah, yes. But..."

They saw HP-35's expression turn serious as she quickly looked off into the

distance, answering whoever was on the other end.

"I can't see from here. Yes, I'll handle it. Hm... understood, I have the coordinates. I'll gather the team and move out immediately."
"35?"
"No time!"

The other three were startled by the sudden rise in her voice.

"It's an emergency! We're under attack!"

. . .

When G36 finally made it down the mountain, she saw Orsis, who wore a careless smile while reviewing her PDA.

"O-Orsis..."
"Ah, G36! You finally caught up."
"You... went in the tent?"
"Hm? No, I didn't. I remembered I had to check a certain sector on the map, so I took care of it."

It was mostly the look of near-relief in G36's eyes that prompted Orsis to tell the little lie so quickly, and the smile she made afterward ensured she didn't feel guilty.

"G-good! We should... hm... oh! We should start by practicing tactics! I'll grab our weapons—won't take long."
"Sure, sounds great~"

At this point, Orsis understood that to keep up the illusion for her friends, she'd have to play along with whatever they suggested. It was a white lie, all in order to not make her friends feel bad.
G36 disappeared into the tent for a short while, and shortly after she came out carrying both of their rifles, she saw the rest of the team approaching from the north. Three of them dashed inside to retrieve their gear, leaving only HP-35 outside.

"Orsis, G36! Prepare to..."

That's when she noticed the two were already equipped, nodding with a hint of pride.

"Good, you're already set. We expect enemies to approach from the northwest, but the forests... wait, this will be easier."

HP-35 pulled a folded map from her small bag and spread it on the ground for

everyone to see. It depicted the entire area designated for the exercise, marking the tents of all the teams, including the commander's. Soon, the other girls exited the tent, and Thunder handed HP-35 her pistol.

"Thanks. As I was saying..."

Using her finger as a pointer, she began explaining the situation.

"We anticipate the enemies from the northwest, but nearly all of the area is dense forest. Only one team is stationed there, and they've been ordered to retreat."
"It's too risky for them to stay there..."
"Exactly."

G36 glanced over at Orsis standing beside her, only to find a face glowing, beaming—a smile that radiated with excitement and bravery in every direction. She couldn't help but ask,

"Orsis... are you feeling alright?"
"Hm? O-oh, of course. It's just..."

Orsis thought she understood what was going on, albeit mistakenly. It was simple. This was all part of the surprise party her friends had planned. Just the welcome in the tent would have been more than enough, but realizing they'd gone to such great lengths to make the day special... she was thrilled!

"We're unsure of the enemy's technological capabilities, so as team leader, all orders will be communicated solely to me to minimize the risk of intercepted transmissions by hostile forces."
"The objective now is..."
"To set up a strong defense and hold the line until reinforcements arrive. This whole region was supposed to be secure, so the commander doesn't want to risk sending us forward and having us fall into a trap. That's why..."
"Orsis will be our team's strongest asset."

Thunder let the statement slip out quietly, as if declaring an indisputable fact. Orsis straightened her shoulders with pride, now fully convinced that everything was designed for her to shine on her birthday.

"Yes! I'll handle it! I'll prove all the training was worth it!"

The others watched her in silence, bewildered by her high spirits, unaware that Orsis believed she was fulfilling a special role.

"Alright... here's the plan. We'll head up the mountain to find a vantage point. Orsis will set up her sniper's nest, and one of us will stay with her, while the rest of us form a perimeter for an alert line. That way, we can escape safely if we're

overwhelmed."
"I can stay with Orsis. We should be able to remain a put up a good team together."

Once again, Thunder volunteered, much to G36's dismay. She didn't want to contradict the suggestion, especially since HP-35, the current leader, didn't seem opposed.

"That won't be necessary."

The birthday girl intervened, her radiant smile unwavering and her eye-catching hair shinning brighter than ever.

"G36 will be my spotter! We've already been practicing and even found the ideal place to set up!"
"A-ah!"

Part of G36 wanted to stop Orsis, feeling she might be undermining the leader's authority, but she couldn't pass up the chance to fight side by side with Orsis for the first time. HP-35 glanced at Thunder, who closed her eyes without a word.

"Oh, the rejection. First from the commander, now Orsis..."
"Don't be so dramatic," Five-seveN chuckled.

. . .

MP40 took the position closest to the approaching enemy, stationed at the very tip of their defensive line. She turned 180 degrees and drew a 90-degree arc with her line of sight. Thunder was at one corner, HP-35 at the other, both positioned about 25 meters up the slope. She raised her arms to signal she was set, prompting those two to exchange glances before looking higher, to a spot roughly 50 meters above their positions. There, G36 received their confirmations and nodded, turning about 45 degrees northward to find Five-seveN, 50 meters away, who nodded back confidently.

"We're all in position."
"Okay~"

Orsis answered in a playful tone, lying on the ground, almost entirely covered by leaves and branches. Although well-hidden, her legs playfully fidgeted, breaking her camouflage.

"Orsis...?"
"Hm? Yes?"
"You've been acting... strange for a while."
"Eh? Why would you say that? I really don't know what you mean."

"Hm..."

G36 sat next to her, barely concealed by the surrounding greenery. She watched her friend from the corner of her eye, then looked ahead. All she could see was a small clearing at the foot of the mountain, which opened into a vast forest that disappeared into the slope of a distant mountain over a kilometer away.

"Why are you so calm, Orsis?"
"Why wouldn't I be?"
"They haven't even told us what type of enemy to expect. Besides..."
"Besides?"
"You've never used your rifle in real combat, have you?"
"A-ah, it's... I just have complete faith in myself! I trust my training completely, and I know justice is on my side~!"
"Orsis..."

Nothing in the justice hero's bright smile reassured the bespectacled T-Doll. She had her suspicions, though she wasn't sure how to address them.

"Maybe... you..."

G36 couldn't finish her thought, as a sharp whistle from below caught her attention. She leaned down to see HP-35 pointing towards the forest, raising her voice.

"They're approaching from the woods! They're... infected! Orders are to hold the line and keep them at bay if they get too close. Orsis, we're counting on you to thin their numbers!"
"Of course~! Leave it to me! I'm completely ready for this!"

HP-35's face flickered with an uneasy surprise, but she had no time to dwell on it as the first gunshot rang out.

"They're here."

In contrast to the sharp noise, Thunder's voice was calm and poised as she slowly reloaded her pistol, standing atop a rock. The next shots were from MP40's gun, quickly joined by those of the others.

"Oh...!"
"Orsis! Focus on the ones still emerging from the trees!"
"Ah! Yes!"

With the same blinding smile that hadn't left her face, Orsis took her friend's direction and, without much thought, aimed at one of the walkers, taking it down with a clean headshot. As she continued firing, she thought, *Wah~! They look

so real! The girls really outdid themselves. Not just them—the commander must have been involved too! I have the best friends and the best commander in the world~.*
G36, doing her best to conserve ammunition, knowing she'd be responsible for Orsis's safety if things got out of hand, also found her footing and opened fire on the encroaching wave of enemies. As she released the trigger, the distant roar of other weapons reached her ears.

"... they're not decreasing... in fact, there's even more of them..."

The zombies were hideous and aggressive, advancing in long strides toward the T-Doll team. The slope slowed them down, but they still gained ground, bit by bit. The sheer number was the main issue—every shot from the girls was accurate, but there were too many enemies to hold back.
Step by step, MP40 began retreating, along with HP-35 and Thunder. Drawing Orsis and G36's attention, Five-seveN shouted their way.

"They're spreading northeast—they're trying to surround us!"
"There are too many... 35!"
"I heard! Go with her, G36! She won't be able to hold them off alone."
"Ah—yes! Orsis, I'm going to—"
"Yes, go with 57. I'll manage here."

The golden-haired girl leaped to her feet and, without a second thought, sprinted to aid the smallest member of their team.
Orsis's smile had faded, replaced by a look of both worry and confusion. She spoke to herself in a low voice, never ceasing her fire. All that training had certainly paid off.

"For a... for a birthday surprise... it's really realistic, really... loud, too. And did they really give us permission to use this much ammo just for this? And what about these... zombies? They're so grotesque, and they don't fall like practice targets or simulations. It's almost as if..."

Orsis emptied another magazine and quickly reached for another with her left hand.

"The last one? Already? Hm..."

She loaded it, but the leader's voice stopped her before she could fire again.

"Everyone, fall back! Head up, then down the mountain on the south side!"
"R-retreat?"

Orsis murmured, slowly standing up as she looked down at her teammates. MP40 was the one to respond to HP-35, her voice rising above the fierce crackle of her

submachine gun.

"If we leave now, the enemy will have a clear path!"
"I just contacted the commander! Reinforcements from the sector's base are close, and the HOCs are in range. If we don't leave, we'll end up caught in the crossfire!"
"You could've started with that part," Thunder muttered, already climbing up the mountain towards Orsis's position at a fast pace.
"All of you! Move now!"
"H-HOCs...?"

Orsis stood there, stunned. She was certain the HOCs hadn't been mentioned in the exercise briefing, and she hadn't seen any arrive with the others. Deploying HOCs would be costly and extremely destructive—an overkill for something as simple and fun as a birthday celebration.
Orsis watched as her teammates made their way up to her position before racing down, disappearing among the trees along the faint path through the bushes. She also saw Five-seveN and G36 retreat, until she was left alone.

"No way..."

But she couldn't even hear her own voice, as a massive explosion, followed by a series of smaller blasts, shattered the air around her. The trees in her line of sight erupted in vivid flashes of color, and the intense winds whipped through leaves and branches, sending her red hair flying. Slowly, she turned, captivated by a scene that was both spectacular and terrifying.
The clearing and the dense forest beyond were under a brutal artillery assault. Explosions rained down in a relentless wave, wiping out the advancing infected who kept coming without pause. The heavy smell of burning wood and scorched earth filled her nose, pulling her back to reality. Letting out a sharp yelp, she scooped up her rifle and bolted downhill at full speed to rejoin her friends, just before another barrage tore into the ground behind her.
As the fastest and most agile of them all—perhaps only rivaled by HP-35 on her bike—Orsis caught up with the others in no time.

"A-artillery?! Was that really necessary?!"
"Ah... ah... Orsis! Finally, you're here!" HP-35 exclaimed, struggling for breath. "Looks like the other sectors are nearly cleared, and most of the remaining enemies are headed our way, so we've been ordered to pull back! The artillery should hold them off long enough for the reinforcements to arrive!"
"R-right..."

Orsis merely nodded at HP-35's explanation. As they sprinted together, G36 stole a sideways glance at her friend, noticing that Orsis's expression wasn't quite as radiant as it had been earlier.

"O-Orsis, is something wrong? Y-you don't look quite yourself."

"Huh? Oh, no, it's nothing! I just... didn't expect so many enemies, haha~"

G36, reassured by Orsis's lighthearted laugh, returned a soft chuckle in response.

"So, how was it, Orsis?"
"What—what do you mean?"
"Your first time using your rifle in actual combat. How did it feel?"
"Oh, that..."

Though she kept running, Orsis's thoughts drifted for a moment. She realized she'd spent that entire first experience thinking it was just a fun game her friends had arranged. She hadn't felt the usual nerves or fears, nor did she hesitate as she repeated the steps of firing her rifle. She couldn't help but laugh, thinking of how funny it would be to tell them about it someday... maybe years down the line.

"It was amazing!"
"Was it?"
"Yes, yes! Didn't you see me up there? I didn't waste a single bullet! Every shot hit its mark! I feel more than ready for deployment—like any other T-Doll! The path of T-5000, hero of justice, has only just begun!"

Some of the other dolls couldn't help but stifle laughter at this declaration, but all fell silent when HP-35 raised her hand to her ear.

"Hm... understood."

She turned back to look at them.

"Good news, girls! Reinforcements are being deployed from the northwest and will intercept the enemies before they can reach the mountain. We've won!"

As excited cheers filled the air, MP40, with a grin, spoke up.

"So, we won't have to move our camp! I'm glad, none of our work went to waste!"

No one voiced it, but Orsis thought back to the decorations she had glimpsed in the tent, and her smile grew even brighter. Regardless of whether things had gone according to plan, it was finally time to celebrate... and, above all, to pretend to be surprised by the gifts she'd already seen.

. . .

When they reached the mountain's base, the tent awaited them. So did the rock where Orsis had rested earlier. But there was also an unwelcome guest—a presence that had certainly not been invited to the party.

"A-ah...!"

"Q-quick, split up and open fire!"

One lone ELID, towering and heavily built, more massive than the others they'd encountered, was aimlessly wandering the area. The moment it spotted them, it charged, launching yet another desperate battle for the T-Doll team. They had one advantage: this particular creature, while immensely strong and resilient, was also slow and clumsy, making it easier to dodge its attacks. The real problem lay elsewhere.

"How much ammo do we all have left?"
"Empty," Thunder replied as she ejected her gun's final shell.

The others made similar gestures, indicating most of them had barely half a magazine left, if that.

"We're... in trouble."

Orsis had stayed a bit further back during the encounter, as her weapon was the largest and heaviest among them, not easy to aim at such close range, especially with the creature constantly shifting targets. She watched as G36 tried to draw the creature's attention with scattered shots but soon had to duck aside when her weapon clicked empty.

"O-out of ammo! I'm out too—wah!"

By sheer luck, or perhaps because the mindless creature had begun predicting their moves, it managed to land a powerful blow, sending G36 flying toward the tent. Orsis saw her friend's glasses drop to the ground, then watched as Five-seveN rushed to help her stand. The infected creature, however, slowly turned its gaze in their direction and started moving toward them.

"...this ends here."

Orsis's rifle held five rounds: one in the chamber, four more in the magazine. Unsure if she could pull off what she was about to attempt, Orsis left her cover, holding the rifle low on her hip like a flamethrower.

"Hey, you big green monster!"

Her shout failed to get its attention, so she fired a shot that slammed into its shoulder, forcing it to turn. Now facing her directly, Orsis, eyes blazing, reloaded with her firing hand and steadied her stance as the creature lumbered her way.

"That's right, come here! I'll show you what real justice is!"

She fired again, and as the distance between them closed, she managed a third shot, both rounds hitting the infected square in the chest.

"Now!"

With only five meters between them, Orsis loaded her second-to-last bullet and rushed toward the creature that had injured her friend. This brute's massive, muscled form could take her out with a single hit, and her speed advantage was nullified at such close range. But she had one chance.
She dashed forward, watching as the creature's heavy fist rose, ready to smash down on her. But in a blink, the red-haired T-Doll was gone.

"...!"

Orsis had slid low across the dirt, raising her rifle just enough to aim, avoiding any chance of the stock hitting the ground. In the split second her barrel aligned with the monster's jaw, she squeezed the trigger.
Without pausing to see if it worked, she completed the slide, chambered her last round in one fluid motion, and twisted around, knee to the ground, aiming her rifle at the back of the creature's head.

"It's over."

The final shot rang out, and the grotesque being collapsed, lifeless.

. . .

"Nothing really went as we'd planned. We even had a ton of extra activities ready, but..."
"No one could have guessed we'd end up fighting off an entire horde of enemies!"
"Hm."
"What is it, Thunder?"
"Regardless, we never got the commander's permission."
"That was probably just because of the situation... and besides..."

Five-seveN set a small cake on the table.
Inside the tent, the six friends sat together, gathering for a long-awaited celebration. Orsis sat at the head of the table, nibbling on some savory snacks while the others chatted about the day's hardships.

"None of that matters anymore! In the end, everything worked out, and we got the commander's approval. Let's just enjoy ourselves and make the most of tonight!"

Night had fallen, and soft, artificial lights illuminated the tent, casting a cozy glow inside and out. Five-seveN approached the cake, lighting a single candle with a lighter.

"We only have a tiny cake, so we should probably finish it off quickly before the

other dolls show up!"
"Oh, I almost forgot—the commander said he'd stop by, even if it's just for a few minutes."
"Hm... I hope we have enough sweets for everyone..."
"Girls, let's not keep Orsis waiting any longer!"

HP-35 clapped twice from the other side of the table to get everyone's attention. She gave a single nod, which the others returned, and as if on cue, they all raised their voices, clapping and smiling at the long-haired, redheaded girl at the head of the table.

"Happy Birthday, Orsis!!!"

Orsis didn't thank them aloud. She looked at each of her friends, one by one, gifting them her trademark, radiant smile, and then blew out the candle in a single breath.

- - -

Art: https://www.pixiv.net/en/artworks/80448183

Mark Commission N°1 - Communication gap

Clank.
A heavy thud echoed against the armored sliding door.
Clank.
Clank.
Clank.
More impacts followed.

"Why are you hitting it? The door slides sideways."
"We tried that already, didn't we?"
"Yeah, I tried. No dice."

Clank.
Clank.

"You're not going to open it that way..."
"Got a better idea?"
"Plenty, actually! Look, you're supposed to find the seams and... here!"

Clank.

"O-ow, that hurt..."
"Ah..."
"Any other brilliant plans?"
"What if we—"
"MOVE ASIDE!"

BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG.
Six gunshots rang out inside the aircraft, reverberating off the interior walls. A moment later, a fierce kick knocked the metal door off its tracks, sending it crashing to the ground with a splash of soil and grass.

"See? Told ya it wasn't that hard~!"

The girl with white pigtails hopped off the helicopter, taking a few light steps before spinning around. Despite the casual grace in her movement, everyone still inside was clutching their ears, stunned by the blast.

"You could've warned us before opening fire in a confined space! Don't you know these flying things are soundproofed?!"

One of the other T-Dolls yelled while disembarking, but the first girl simply shrugged.

"Is the new Commander okay, Honey?"
"It's Honey Badger, it feels weird if you just say half. And yeah, he's fine. SL8 is checking on him. Ah—"

A small animal leapt from the vehicle seconds later, landing beside its owner, Honey Badger, who glanced back at their now-ruined, smoking transport.
The tail cone of the helicopter had been hit by an explosive round. The blast wasn't strong enough to reach the fuel tanks, but it had sheared off two drive shafts. The crash had taken care of the rest, though the passenger cabin had survived in tolerable condition—at least, given the height of the fall.

"I guess... we're lucky to be alive."
"Let's take count, Honey."
"Let's see... Pett and I are good," the little companion barked at the sound of his name, "you're fine too, SPAS. SL8 was unscathed when I saw her—that leaves—"
"The Commander's safe!"

With a shout bordering on a roar, SL8 emerged through the doorway, carrying the mentioned Commander over one shoulder. She stepped out and gently lowered the dazed human onto the grass, while Honey Badger hurried to double-check he was unharmed. SL8 brushed the dust off her outfit with a hint of irritation.

"What the hell was that? Wasn't this route supposed to be secure?"
"Intel must've been off—or maybe the pilots messed up... Ah, SL8, the others..."
"Ingram and Model L are still inside. I couldn't tell if they were okay. I think I heard Ingram's voice, but—"
"I'm fine."

All eyes turned toward the doorway. Half-emerged from the wreck was the calm and impassive Ingram MAC-10.

"The crash shut down my visual modules. I had to reboot them before I could get up."
"Well, glad you're alright..."
"Sure, I guess."
"If you and Model L are both uninjured, that means no one got seriously hurt. That's a big relief."

SL8 looked to SPAS, then turned to Ingram with a face that clearly didn't expect

good news.

"Ingram, what about Model L?"
"She's right here with me."
"..."
"..."
"Why isn't she saying anything?"
"She can't right now."
"Ingram..."

SL8 furrowed her brow, scratching behind her head as she chose her next words with care.

"Why... why can't Model L speak?"

Sensing her cue, Ingram revealed a faint, unnerving smirk and stepped fully into view. She didn't appear injured in the slightest. In her right hand was her signature automatic, and in the left...

"Ah—Ingram, is that...?"
"Hehe."

In her left hand, she held a cube.

"Is that Model L's core?!"

Honey Badger pointed, eyebrows knitted in alarm.
Ingram exhaled, letting the cube dance across her palm.

"You couldn't see it from where you were, but part of the chopper's frame came down on her head. Took it clean off. The best I could do was yank her core out and bring it along."

With some effort, Ingram clipped Model L's core to the side of her shorts under the stunned gaze of the others.

"...There. Now she goes wherever we do."

Another unsettling grin, then back to her usual detached stare.

"So, where to next?"
"Well..."

SL8 scanned her surroundings to count the remaining T-Dolls. Then she looked to the Commander, who had just gotten to his feet and was dusting off his uniform. She waited as he adjusted his beret, then spoke softly.

"We've got another problem..."

Honey Badger, knowing exactly what she meant, glanced at the Commander with growing concern.

"Commander... we can't afford to be stranded here waiting for rescue. We need orders—and a direction—fast."
"..."

The Commander looked at her silently, then offered a sheepish smile and scratched his left cheek.

"Disculpa, no entiendo lo que estás diciendo."

Every T-Doll—except Ingram—facepalmed in unison with a silent groan.
SL8 spoke again.

"Remind me—what language is he speaking?"
"Spanish. The new Commander... only speaks Spanish."
"Who hires someone monolingual for this kind of job? What were they thinking?"

SPAS stepped in before SL8 could completely dismantle what little authority the Commander had left. She moved up beside him, latching onto one arm, catching him off guard, and looked to her teammates with hope.

"S-surely they had a good reason! Even if he can't... understand us, he must be an exceptional strategist! He'll get us through this, no problem!"

Once again, the Commander didn't understand a word, but he smiled warmly at SPAS, grateful for the support.
SL8 slung her rifle over her shoulder and addressed the group.

"Any of you speak Spanish?"
"Model L does."

Ingram answered, giving a little hip bump to make the cube on her shorts sway.
No one needed help interpreting the smug look she wore.
Muffled curses and bitter mutterings followed from the rest of the squad.
Probably just as well the Commander couldn't understand them.

"The one person who could translate for us is out of commission. Perfect."

SL8 let out a bitter chuckle, but Honey Badger suddenly perked up.

"Oh, wait. The Commander was talking to the pilots before we were hit. They should also—"

But the faint hope that had begun to bloom was quickly extinguished by Ingram, who had wandered over to the cockpit while no one was watching.

"I don't think we'll be getting help from the pilots..."

No one replied. Ingram simply made a "bleh" sound, sticking out her tongue and drawing her thumb across her neck in a universal "they're toast" gesture.

. . .

The group was heading north, leaving the helicopter behind as they delved deeper into a dense forest. At the front walked Honey Badger, grumbling under her breath while repeatedly, and fruitlessly, attempting to establish a connection with HQ.

"Sigh... it's no use. The whole area's jammed—no way to get through to... anyone. Commander..."

She turned to look at the lone man in their squad, who had been wandering distractedly, admiring the trees. At the sound of the one word he could understand, he looked at her and smiled eagerly, clearly ready to help however he could. Honey Badger was reminded, yet again, of the invisible barrier between him and the rest of the team, and scratched the back of her head.

"SL8..."
"Hmm?"

The tallest of the group, sporting sharp teeth and a lithe frame, was walking just behind the Commander.

"Yeah? What's up?"
"Can you come closer? I need to talk to you."

With a series of small, silent hops, SL8 passed the Commander and came to walk side by side with Honey Badger at the front.

"What's going on? Something so serious the Commander can't hear it?"
"He couldn't understand us even if we yelled it in his face."
"Ahaha, true~"
"Sigh... that's exactly what I wanted to talk about. We need orders, SL8. Clear ones. And this Commander... well, he's not much help."
"That's harsh..."

SL8 cast a discreet glance back at the Commander.

"He looks competent."
"He might be the best Commander on Earth, but what good is that if we can't

understand a word he says? How is it that none of us speaks Spanish? Who assigned this squad?"
"Well... there was someone who could..."

SL8's gaze dropped to Ingram's hip, where Model L's Core swung, less than gently, attached to her shorts. Ingram, meanwhile, was staring at the Commander's back, lost in whatever thoughts only she knew.

"The point is, under these conditions, we're sitting ducks. If the enemy's already spotted us and decides to attack... I fear our chances aren't great."
"So, what are you suggesting, Honey?"
"You too? Sigh... I'm saying one of us should take over command until we reach the rendezvous."

SL8 let out a short whistle, resting her weapon against her shoulder.

"HQ won't like us bypassing the Commander's authority."
"What other choice do we have? And besides, it's just until we find someone who can understand him and..."

She glanced again at the leader, who looked back at her with another warm, clueless smile.

"...it's the only way to protect him. I'd rather get punished for insubordination than have to report the death of the new Commander."
"Can't argue with that... also—"
"Oh! Girls, over here!"

SPAS called out, veering off the trail. Vanishing briefly into the underbrush, only her face and a waving hand were visible from the path.

"It's perfect! This'll keep us safe from any enemy air strikes!"

Behind her, carved into the side of a hill nestled in the woods, was the entrance to an old tunnel, accessible only by a long-forgotten dirt road.

"Looks pretty secure! Oh—and I can't even see the end, so there's probably a curve up ahead. One thing's for sure: if we take this route, that's one less threat to worry about!"
"Well..."

While SPAS tried to explain the situation to the Commander, Honey Badger studied the map she had downloaded earlier.

"It's true—the exit is conveniently close to our destination, but..."
"This would be an ideal spot for an ambush."

Ingram, who had stepped a few paces into the tunnel, spoke with calm detachment.

"Exactly... well, SL8."
"Hm? Me?"
"You're in charge now."
"Ah..."
"You're the most qualified. You can't refuse. Do we take the tunnel?"
"Can't really say no..."

The sharp-toothed, pretty-faced T-Doll scratched the back of her head, resting her rifle on her shoulder as she stared into the tunnel, as if hoping some divine sign would guide her. She looked at the Commander, hoping for a word of insight, but all she got was a blank, innocent gaze. He smiled again and gave her a thumbs-up.
To this day, SL8 still doesn't know if the Commander actually understood the plan and was giving his approval, or if he was simply as lost as his face suggested.

"Sigh. Alright, we'll take the tunnel. Ingram and SPAS will lead, the Commander stays in the middle, Honey Badger and I will bring up the rear. Ten meters of spacing between each of us."

The Dolls all nodded, though the Commander's expression remained unchanged.

"H-hmn..."

SL8's face twisted slightly in awkwardness as she hesitated for a moment. While the rest prepared to move, she approached the Commander, who hadn't taken his eyes off her.

"Ehm... we..."

She gestured in a circle with her hand, trying to convey "everyone."

"Will go through the tunnel."

She formed a ring with her left hand and passed her right arm through it.

"Spaced out!"

She spread both hands apart, signaling distance.

"You! In the middle!"

She pointed at the Commander, then to herself.
The Commander stopped smiling. His eyes widened subtly in disbelief, mouth hanging open for a few seconds before he raised both hands in protest, as if to say

"now's really not the time."
SL8 raised an eyebrow, utterly confused by his response.

"What are you doing?"

SL8 turned toward the voice and found Honey Badger wearing an expression identical to the Commander's.

"I'm just trying to..."
"Forget it, this'll be quicker."

Without saying a word to him, Honey Badger handed the Commander a sheet of paper showing a surprisingly detailed diagram of their intended formation for crossing the tunnel. Only then did the Commander nod in understanding and give SL8 another cheerful thumbs-up.
She sighed, visibly disappointed.

. . .

Honey Badger watched the Commander walking just ahead of her. All she could think about was how carefree he looked, as if there wasn't a chance they could be ambushed at any moment. Hands in his coat pockets, he scanned his surroundings with idle curiosity, despite how little could actually be seen inside the dim tunnel.
She glanced over her shoulder, and the sight gave her a sense of ease—SL8 was taking her role as rear guard seriously. Her eyes never left the path they had already crossed. Not that Honey had ever doubted her, but seeing her in action was... reassuring.
At the front, SPAS dictated the group's pace. Her steps were cautious but steady, her shotgun held close to her abdomen, finger hovering just off the trigger. It was odd to see such a serious expression on her face—so unlike her usual demeanor. That expression, however, began to fade when she heard a familiar voice.

"Let's switch."
"Eh?"

She turned her head while walking, only to find Ingram beside her.

"What are you doing up here? You're way too close—we're supposed to keep—"
"Shh, I heard the order. That's why I said we should switch. Take my place at the back."
"Eh? Why? Did the Comman—no, he didn't. Did SL8 say to switch?"
"No, I just don't feel like being in the back. I'd rather be the first to spot the enemy. Better for all of us."

Ingram's words had a slight edge to them, one SPAS couldn't quite place. She

puffed her cheeks and looked forward again, picking up the pace.
Behind her, the Commander—unaware of the exchange—matched her speed, followed closely by the two T-Dolls behind him.

"I'm not leaving the front unless ordered to."
"Eh? Don't be stubborn. I'm better suited for this role."
"S-stubborn?! And what makes you more qualified than me to take point?"
"We need someone fast."
"I am fast!"
"Not with that fat ass! We need someone who can run and draw fire if things get messy. That's not exactly your forte~"
"W-what?!"

Ingram knew exactly what she was doing, and the smug grin on her lips grew as SPAS came to a sudden stop, making the rest of the group halt as well.

"I-it's not fat! I've been on a diet lately, there's no way I've gained weight! No, that's not even the point!"
"Hehehe..."
"I can run just as well as any other Doll; you're just trying to—!"
"Spas, what's happening up there?"

SL8's voice cut through, snapping SPAS out of it. She straightened up and looked back, biting her tongue.

"Ingram? Why are you at the front?"
"She stopped, so I came to check what was wrong, Leader~"
"That...!"

SPAS immediately realized she'd been tricked. If she said they were arguing over something so petty, both of them would end up scolded—especially judging by the suspicious look Honey Badger was already throwing their way.

"It's..."

She caught a glimpse of Ingram's ever-present smirk and pouted subtly. She didn't want to back down, but neither did she want to deal with a scolding she didn't deserve.

"Ah—Pett!"

Honey Badger's voice cut the tension like a blade. Everyone turned just in time to see the little creature dash to the front at full speed, barreling straight toward SPAS.
All eyes were on it, waiting to see what had triggered the sudden burst of energy.

"W-woah!"

Pett leapt onto SPAS—but only to spring off her like a trampoline, launching itself up toward the ceiling. Midair, it slashed in a very specific direction. Sparks erupted as the impact struck something hidden, and Pett landed gracefully, caught by Ingram.

"W-what is...?"

"Optical camouflage! It's an enemy!"

Without thinking, SPAS opened fire at the ceiling. A spider-like robot, now partially visible, was shredded and came crashing to the ground in pieces. Almost immediately, the sound of dozens of metallic steps echoed across the tunnel ceiling.
The Commander felt a hand yank him down, forcing him into a sitting position. He looked up to see SL8 covering him, barking orders.

"Take them out!"

Bullets flew upward. The Dolls fired almost blindly, relying only on audio sensors. Occasionally, sparks marked a hit, and another spider was exposed just long enough to fall, though rarely from a direct shot. Suddenly, Honey Badger was flung to the side by a strike from above.

"Honey!"

Pett rushed to her, determined to fight off whatever unseen threat approached her while she recovered. Aligning herself with Pett's stance and the source of the sounds, Honey Badger raised her weapon and emptied an entire magazine.
The spider, now fully visible, twitched and collapsed.

"We can't fight like this, SL8!"
"There's no choice! Both exits are too far! We'd be risking the Commander!"

From his awkward spot on the floor, the Commander watched SL8 shielding him. Oddly enough, his face showed no real fear or panic.
The truth was, he was capable—an exemplary leader, hampered only by his language barrier.
They had recruited a Commander who didn't even speak English—surely that spoke volumes about his talent.
Turning his head, he focused on the spider Honey Badger had just downed. It was nearly a meter in diameter, matte black, and still smoldering from its destruction.
Smoldering...
His eyes lit up with realization.

"Spas, Honey Badger, look for a—kueh?!"

A hand brushed SL8's stomach without warning. She turned her head in shock to see the Commander, but was too surprised to ask what was happening.
The Commander reached further, then pulled open the pouch on SL8's right thigh.

"Commander...?"

The man who supposedly couldn't communicate smiled at her and pulled out exactly what he'd been looking for.

"A smoke grenade? What good is that now?"

He opened his mouth, paused, and instead pointed at the destroyed spider—and more specifically, the smoke wafting from it.
SL8 raised an eyebrow, confused... until sudden understanding lit her face. Her grin grew wide, revealing sharp teeth.

"The smoke blocks the light..."
"Now I get it! Attention, team! It's risky, but we've got a shot! Ingram!"
"Hm?"
"Toss a smoke grenade!"
"Here?!"
"Just do it!"

Ingram, unusually compliant, grabbed a grenade, yanked the pin, and dropped it at her feet. The Commander threw his as well.
Seconds flew by, and as the smoke spread, the T-Dolls stared in awe—one by one, the spiders became partially visible.

"NOW!"

Chaos exploded. SL8 gently shoved the Commander flat and pinned him down with a knee, trying her best to shield him from the incoming fire.
From his spot on the floor, he heard screeching, explosions, and the echo of Ingram's maniacal laughter.
He couldn't see, and assumed the Dolls could barely see either—but identifying semi-visible targets was far better than shooting at invisible ones.
He covered his ears as SL8 fired right beside him, staying sharp in case he was needed again.
Eventually, one final shot rang out—SPAS's shotgun, unmistakable.

"Hold your fire!"

Honey Badger's voice cut through the noise.
Everyone froze. Slowly, the smoke began to clear.

When it was safe to stand, the Commander got up and looked around. The tunnel was littered with ruined spiders, and the Dolls were reloading their weapons.

"That was... close."
"Yeah..."

The Commander let out a relieved sigh—and then felt a heavy pat on the back from SL8.

"Way to go, Commander! What was that about? How did you know the smoke would work?"
"Well..."

He cleared his throat, raising his voice for all to hear.

"El camuflaje óptico funciona por medio de sensores y muchas veces por medio de espejos. El factor común en ambos es la manera en que necesitan desviar la luz en la trayectoria deseada para evitar que el objeto camuflado se vea reflejado en ella. Las partículas en el humo crean cierta interferencia en el funcionamiento de estos camuflajes, lo que puede reducir altamente su efectividad a distancias cortas. Fue una tirada de dados, no estaba seguro de que pudiese funcionar, pero es un alivio ver que todo salió bien. De igual manera, el mayor mérito es de todas ustedes por saber aprovechar esa ventana ¡Muy bien hecho!"

He finished with a firm thumbs-up.
The Dolls exchanged glances. No words were said—but they all returned the gesture.

. . .

The light at the end of the tunnel—never more fittingly said—grew stronger as they turned the final bend leading to the exit. Maintaining their earlier formation, the T-Dolls advanced with the same tense caution as before, wary of yet another possible trap along the path.

"According to our intel, the rendezvous point is less than two kilometers past the tunnel's exit. It's a straight road. Not exactly... secure, but short. If we sprint through it, we should be fine."

SL8 finished as sunlight began to reach her boots, marking her emergence from the tunnel. On the other side, the road was flanked by dense forest, giving the illusion of safety.

"Then let's not waste any more time. Let's go."

Honey Badger's voice pushed the group forward—until a voice from behind froze them in place.

"Hm! And to think such a small, unbalanced squad could eliminate the spiders... No... That wasn't in my plans."

Standing atop the tunnel, casting a long and ominous shadow across the clearing, was a platinum-haired Doll dressed in black, arms crossed with an unmistakable air of superiority.

"I-it's...!"
"Destroyer..."

The T-Dolls immediately assumed combat positions. This time, SPAS stepped in front of the Commander and deployed her shield.

"SL8, what do we do?"
"...I don't know. I'm not sure we can take her on..." SL8 glanced at the Commander before finishing her sentence, "...not like this."

Despite everything, the Commander still bore that relaxed expression of his.

"Griffin scum! Is this really all? Just a handful of lowly Dolls protecting the almighty Commander? Pathetic! I'll scatter your broken frames across the forest and take the Commander for myself!"

SL8 bit her lower lip. Behind her, Honey Badger whispered.

"There's a way."
"I'm listening."
"Based on reports and sim data... Destroyer isn't exactly what you'd call smart. If we distract her long enough, or convince her that attacking us here isn't worth it..."
"You think she'd fall for that? I mean, sure, she's not a genius, but still..."
"If the reports are accurate, it's more likely than you'd think."

SL8 clicked her tongue, eyes still locked on Destroyer.

"Ugh, fine. In the meantime, send Pett to the rendezvous point. If someone's there, they can help."
"Already done. Pett's on the way."
"Good."

The squad leader looked back at the Commander with an apologetic smile, then grabbed him by the collar of his coat and lifted him out from behind SPAS's shield. Like a kitten being picked up by its scruff, the Commander didn't resist.

"This Commander? Is this who you're looking for?"
"Eh? Ah... I guess?" Destroyer scratched her chin. "At least that's what Dreamer said..."

"Sangvis intelligence is garbage. This guy barely qualifies as a Commander! You've got the wrong target, Destroyer!"
"What?! Impossible! I've been tailing you since we shot down your chopper! There's no way I'm mistaken!"

To everyone's relief, Destroyer had fallen into the trap with minimal effort. Honey Badger subtly looked toward the road—and was the only one to spot Pett sprinting at full speed.

"I'm telling you the truth, Destroyer. He doesn't know how to command, he has zero skills, and he can't even communicate!"
"Nonsense! I can see his insignia—he's clearly a Commander!"
"He's a trainee! We were escorting him to base so they could evaluate his potential. Just look at him."
"Huh..."
"One glance and it's obvious—he's totally useless!"

'Sorry about this, Commander. I don't mean a word of it,' SL8 murmured under her breath. Naturally, to the Commander, it all sounded like incomprehensible babble as he continued to eye Destroyer and her weapons.

"A-aren't you being a little too harsh? Isn't he your Commander? Aren't you supposed to respect him or... or something?"

Even Destroyer seemed thrown off by SL8's ruthless belittling. Her menacing aura had all but dissipated.

"Respect is a strong word. We just follow the chain of command."

The Commander, still clueless, turned to look at the Doll holding him. SL8's face was visibly flushed.
'I swear, Commander, I'm lying through my teeth—just distracting this midget until backup gets here,' she thought, then burst out laughing for show.

"Hahaha! See now? This isn't your guy, Destroyer. The real Commander was in another helicopter!"
"N-no..."
"Yes!"

Destroyer scratched her head. If SL8 was right, the punishment awaiting her back at base would be unbearable. A chill ran down her spine, but she pressed on, needing more certainty.

"T-that's not enough! If he's not the Commander, I need more proof!"
"Eh?! More proof? Well..."

SL8 flashed a wide, toothy grin, her sharp teeth catching the sunlight.

"This Commander doesn't even speak English!"
"Eh?"

Destroyer's expression shifted from concern to dismay almost instantly.

"He... he doesn't speak the language? That's why—he can't communicate?"
"Exactly! Tragic, right?"
"No way..."
"Believe it!"

'Your moment to shine, Commander,' SL8 whispered, lifting him a little higher.

"Go on, ask him something! You'll see—he'll just stare at you like a clueless puppy!"

Utterly confused, Destroyer looked into the Commander's eyes and asked in a surprisingly gentle tone:

"A-are you... the Commander I've been looking for?"

The Commander hadn't understood a word of their exchange. As far as he could tell, they'd been arguing and insulting each other this whole time, and now was his moment to pour salt on the wound. Only one word from SL8 had stuck with him—a word he remembered from earlier.
With sunlight gleaming in his eyes, the Commander raised his hand skyward and pointed directly at Destroyer.

"Midget."

Time stopped.

"Eh?"

All the Dolls echoed in unison—except for Destroyer.
She blinked a few times, processing what she'd just heard. Her face flushed red, eyebrows furrowed, and though she tried to scream, the insult had been so blunt that she could only force a twisted smile as she raised her grenade launchers.

"S-so that's how you wanna play, huh? You... COMMANDER!!!"
"Crap! Cover the Commander's retreat!"

SL8 hurled the Commander as far as she could. Ingram caught him mid-air by the coat and bolted at full speed.
Explosions followed immediately. Destroyer unleashed a torrential storm of grenades, forcing the T-Dolls and the Commander to flee, dodging by luck more

than skill.

"You'll die! All of you will die right here and now!!!"
"Hahahahaha! What was that, Commander?! Your timing was perfect! Though next time, maybe warn us!"

None of the others shared Ingram's enthusiasm. The Commander watched Model L's core bounce at Ingram's side and wondered how much easier this mission would've been if that sweet Doll had been their translator.

"Pett!"

Honey Badger surged forward, spotting her companion sprinting toward them from the distance.

"No way. It's alone?! Don't tell me... no one's at the rendezvous point?! We're doomed!"
"No, Honey. I don't think that's it..."

Gripping her head while running, Honey Badger was beginning to despair—until Spas called out and pointed upward.

"I think... he's warning us about that."

From beyond the horizon, soaring with the majesty of a blockbuster war film's climactic moment, two Mil Mi-28NM helicopters thundered into view, their engines roaring with righteous fury.

"Ah."

Everyone said it at once—even the Commander. Only Destroyer's furious shouts were louder than the mechanical growl of the approaching aircraft.
The enemy Doll never stopped firing grenades, but when the dust and smoke grew too thick, even she could no longer see her targets.

"Will you cowards run all day?! Face me and—ah."

She finally looked up, eyes locking on the helicopters. As calm as she tried to remain, her weapons lowered, scanning the missile racks they carried.

"O-oh no... b-but if I go back without the Commander, Dreamer's going to..."

Before she could finish, one missile launched—and she jumped from the tunnel roof with a shriek.

"If I stay I'll die anyway—wah!!"

As she tried to run into the tunnel, the missile hit the entrance, sending her flying through the air. She landed awkwardly on the dirt, watching the tunnel collapse. Tears in her eyes, she scrambled to her feet and ran for dear life. Those helicopters would chase her for a while yet...

. . .

"And that... concludes our report."

Honey Badger dropped a stack of papers onto the Commander's desk. Nearby, SL8 absentmindedly toyed with a Rubik cube in her hands.

"Should we mention that the pilots survived after all?"
"No, that's in the rescue team's report."
"Well, either way... it's a relief."
"Mhm..."

The first Doll glanced at the one holding the cube and sighed quietly.

"The Commander?"
"In a meeting. They had to find him a T-Doll who could act as a translator."
"Really..."

Her next sigh was audible, though her face betrayed no irritation.

"...think he'll do alright?"

At that, SL8 lowered the cube, flashed a small smile, and winked at Honey Badger.

"Yeah. I think he will."

Jurassic Weeb Commission N°2 - Thiya hini

"That's it? I don't even have the right to refuse?"
"No, you don't, Commander."
"Kalina..."
"Enjoy your vacation, Commander~ Your cute adjutant will take care of everything in your absence~"
"But—"
"No buts! Don't cause the girls too much trouble, bye~"

With that, the Jeep door that had taken him to this small town — far away from practically everything — slammed shut, and the driver sped off, leaving the Commander behind.
He had been forced that morning to wear casual clothes and to carry a bag that had been packed for him earlier by his dolls. He had a few ideas, but he never thought he would be forced to take a break.

"Ah... has it really been that long since I last rested?"

A short chuckle behind him made him turn around lazily — and he couldn't help but smile a little at the sight that awaited him.

"You guys..."

UMP9, who looked even more excited than usual, watched him with her very particular expression. Behind her stood the rest of Squad 404.
They were all wearing casual clothes too, and none seemed to have their weapons with them.

"It's perfect, Commander!"
"Is it?"
"Of course! We helped Kalina pick this place for the vacation! Oh, and just so you know, we already booked the hotel and everything~"
"And... why here?"
"Well, that's because—"
"This town is within Griffin's immediate action and protection range. If any unforeseen situation occurs, reinforcements would arrive in just a few minutes."

416 interjected, finishing with a short sigh and giving G11 — who had fallen asleep standing up — a light chop to the head.

"Buah!"
"And we're here because someone had to look after our helpless Commander~"

UMP45 concluded.

"I see, I see... Ah, well, I don't fully agree with this, but there's no point arguing at this stage. 9..."
"Yes, Commander?"

The Commander slung the bag over his shoulder before continuing.

"Please, show me the way to the hotel."
"With pleasure~"

. . .

It was a relief for the Commander to find that those two demons from 404 had at least gotten him his own room on the sixth floor of the only hotel in town.
After taking care of check-in and dropping off his luggage, he left his room and walked through a humble yet well-maintained hallway until he reached a common room, full of sofas and small tables, its walls made of tempered glass.
He approached the edge to look outside.
It was about ten in the morning. The town wasn't very big, but it seemed to have held up well through adversity.
He could see activity in the streets and parks, which reassured him and made him smile, thinking maybe it wasn't a bad idea to stop and breathe for a while.
The only thing that made him feel a bit sad was thinking Kalina couldn't be there with him.

"It's a shame we can't take a vacation together..."
"Oh~? Commander, who could you be talking about, I wonder~?"
"45? It's not nice to spy on people."
"I wasn't spying on anyone, Commander. It's not my fault you can't help but think out loud the moment we leave you alone~"

45 had arrived first, but the Commander could see the others coming down the hallway too.
They all carried small handbags, except for UMP9, who had two — she came over and handed one to the Commander.

"This one's for you, Commander!"
"Hm?"

Checking inside, he found little more than a swimsuit, towels, and a couple of other small items.

"Uh... I didn't see a pool on the way here, 9..."
"Because there isn't one!"

He gave the others a questioning look.

"There's a... a... I don't remember the name, in the basement."

416, standing right behind G11, finished the thought.

"A simulation room. It's basically the best feature of the hotel, and renting it costs a ton of money."
"And... I assume you rented it? Where did the money come from?"
"Only Kalina knows that, Commander. She made all the arrangements."

416 shrugged, and the Commander turned to look at 45, who let out a short giggle.

"It's like traveling the world without all the complications, Commander~"
"And what kind of place will it simulate for us?"
"You can choose by talking to that guy at the front desk."
"The swimsuits..."

Raising both her voice and her arms, UMP9 caught the attention of the few other guests in the hotel.

"We trust that the Commander will pick a beach for us to relax on! That's what we all want! Right, 416?"
"Eh?! D-don't drag me into this! I-I didn't even give my opinion! A-anyway, what matters is what the Commander decides. We're just his—"
"Eh? But weren't you the one who picked the swimsuit for him~?"
"U-UMP9!!"

While he smiled affectionately at their harmless bickering, he felt 45 tug lightly at his shirt.

"The sooner you pick a destination, the sooner the simulation will be ready for us, Commander. Don't keep the ladies waiting~"

. . .

At the reception desk, a tablet was brought to the Commander, containing a massive catalog of real-world tourist destinations that could be replicated inside the simulation room.
He stood there, leaning against the wall while trying to choose the best one.

The dolls sat on a nearby couch, chatting about unimportant things. G11, of course, was sleeping.

"Hm, a beach, huh...? Still, the amount of destinations is amazing. The Forest of Dean, Yellowstone Park, Iguazu Falls, the Borneo jungle, Ningaloo Reef..."

The Commander scratched his head, questioning himself.

"How can they even simulate such... huge and varied places...?"

He raised his eyes to look at his bodyguards — though none of them were looking back at him.
When his eyes landed on 45, a small memory came to him.
Something that, casually and without much thought, UMP9 had once mentioned about a place UMP45 would like to visit.
He quickly looked back down and, without wasting time, slid through destination after destination — smiling to himself when he found the one he was looking for.

"I want this one."

He told the front desk attendant.
The dolls turned upon hearing him speak. The young man nodded with a smile and left silently.

"What place did you choose, Commander?"

45 came over to ask.
He hesitated a few seconds, then diverted his gaze, faking a mischievous smile.

"Hm... I don't remember, just picked one at random. But it's a beach, don't worry."
"Huh~? You're terrible at lying, Commander. Well, I'll let you keep your little secret."
"It'll be ready in twenty minutes. There's a waiting room in the basement."

The whole group moved toward the elevator ahead of the Commander.
The girls seemed a bit more cheerful than usual, which made him wonder whether they were always like this when he wasn't around — or if the relaxed situation itself had brought down their usual seriousness.
Only one of them looked back at him: UMP9.
Without saying a word, she flashed a playful smile and winked at him, as if guessing his intentions and sharing in the conspiracy.
He simply smiled back.

. . .

In front of the group loomed a massive gate.
The basement was incredibly tall; the ceiling stood about ten meters above the

floor.
Although the waiting room wasn't especially large, it was clear that beyond that gate lay a room larger than the entire hotel itself.
A light on the wall changed from red to green, and the gate began to slowly fold upwards.
UMP45 spoke.

"Finally~ I can't wait to see what's waiting for us~"

UMP9 gave the Commander a nudge with her elbow, making him chuckle softly.

"I hope you like it."
"For your sake, I hope we do~"

But UMP45's voice started to trail off into her own breath as a paradisiacal view unfolded before them.

"Oh~! Way to go, Commander~! This is amazing!"

UMP9 was the first to run ahead, twirling on the sand while soaking in the breathtaking scenery.
The shining sky seemed truly endless, just like the sea that stretched far beyond the eye could see.
416 followed her more calmly, and behind her came G11, who curiously looked around.
The Commander moved forward too — but stopped when he didn't hear the footsteps of the last member of the group behind him.
UMP45 stood still, unable to take her eyes off the horizon, her expression unreadable.
It was unusual for her, and the Commander wondered if choosing that destination had been a good idea or not.

"45? Is something wrong?"
"..."

UMP45 finally turned to look at him, and only then was she able to speak.
Clearing her throat, she quickly slipped back into her usual demeanor.

"The Maldives, Commander?"
"Oh? You can recognize it so easily? Have you been here before?"
"Of course not. How could I, Commander~?"

She finally moved forward, and the gate closed behind her, soon covered by the same hologram that concealed the walls of the simulation room.

"It's just an image... that I had seen once before."

Without saying more, she walked past the Commander and analyzed her surroundings.
There was a single cabin on the wide sandy beach, partially hidden by occasional trees that blocked the rays of the artificial sun.

"Ah... well. Ladies, let's go change into our swimsuits. I hope we don't need to leave someone on guard duty in case the Commander tries to peek~"
"I know I wouldn't survive if I even tried something like that..."
"Good to know you understand~"

. . .

After the Commander finally got his turn to change inside the cabin, he simply stood and watched the seemingly endless artificial sea before him.
UMP9 hadn't waited for anyone and had already thrown herself into the water, where she was now teasing a floating G11.
The Commander let out a soft laugh and glanced sideways, spotting 416 sitting on a towel on the sand, wearing a white swimsuit, a cap, and sunglasses.
She wasn't speaking, but anyone who knew her could tell she was in a good mood.

"Huh?"

The Commander noticed something else.
416 was holding some sort of alcoholic drink, probably taken from the fridge inside the cabin.
When she heard his voice, she turned to look at him.

"Commander? Something wrong?"
"N-no..."

He could only brace himself for what he knew would come later.
A sigh next to him made him turn his head slowly.

"That's going to be a problem in a little while~"

UMP45, in her black bikini with yellow-orange accents, was standing with her arms behind her back, slightly leaning forward.
416 heard her but decided to ignore the comment.

"Could you take care of her later, 45?"
"Should I~? 416 is an elite Doll, after all. She should be fine~"
"Commander! The water feels amazing! Come play with us!"

Both of them looked toward UMP9, who was still teasing poor G11, and decided to join them in the artificial sea.

. . .

"Ah~ what a nice place. Kalin really picked well."
"Yeah... it's surprising they managed to set up this whole simulation in just a few minutes..."
"Simulation..."

The Commander and UMP45 sat under a wide umbrella. Each had a towel draped over their shoulders, though neither had fully dried off yet. They watched UMP9 continue to mess with G11, though at some point it seemed G11 decided to fight back, splashing water at UMP9 with equal force.

"Hm... Commander, I have a question for you."
"Why do you sound so serious all of a sudden?"
"You're just imagining it~"
"Huh... what's the question?"

UMP45 averted her gaze from the Commander, losing herself in the man-made horizon, where even the distant images of lost ships could be seen.

"Why did you choose this destination?"

The Commander subtly lowered his gaze toward her. He caught the side of UMP45's face, reflecting an uncommon expression. There was no darkness in her features, but rather a deep, almost hidden sense of longing and melancholy. Though a small smile lingered on her lips, her eyes screamed that all she wanted was to stare into that eternity forever.
He didn't take his eyes off her and answered in a soft voice.

"Because I knew you would like it."

The only answer he received was UMP45's eyes focusing back on him. They lit up, and her sad smile grew just a little more tender. It was probably the most genuine smile the Commander had ever seen from her.

"Was I wrong?"
"... no."

Before the Commander could predict it, UMP45 rested her head against his arm and closed her eyes. He felt her weight and a rising urge to brush her face with his fingers, but he held back. Soon, he heard her speak.

"I bet 9 had something to do with this. That girl..."
"I owe her thanks."
"Oh? Why's that, Commander?"
"Because thanks to her, I got to see you smile like that..."

UMP45 didn't answer, nor did she lift her face, reluctant to let the Commander see how much her cheeks had reddened from his words.

"He... hehehe~"
"What's so funny?"
"Nothing, it's nothing. I just... no, it doesn't matter."

45 straightened up, separating from the Commander.

"I'm going to do it someday."
"Do what, Commander?"
"Take you to the Maldives."

45's smile was replaced by genuine surprise. So much so, she couldn't find the right words.
The Commander looked serious, like someone taking an oath before a judge—or giving their vows at an altar.

"Someday. Not today, not tomorrow. Maybe not even in five or ten years, but... when all this is over, I'll find a way to take you to the Maldives."
"..."
"Just the two of us. We'll get away from everything, forget about everything. It'll be—"

The Commander couldn't finish.
UMP45's index finger pressed lightly against his lips, stopping him. She tilted her head slightly to the side, unconsciously softening her voice.

"Don't reveal your plans, Commander. When the time comes... I want you to surprise me."
"... alright, I promise."

They fell silent for a few seconds, only to start laughing quietly, almost at the same time.

"Commander!"

A third voice startled them both, making them jump back slightly.
416 practically threw herself onto them. Her face was flushed red, and her steps were unsteady. 416 was drunk.

"W-what is it, 416?"
"What do you mean, what is it?! There's nothing left, Commander! The hotel stingy bastards barely put any bottles in the fridge! How do they expect that little to be enough for five people?! I should go have a piece of my mind with them!"
"Wait, 416."

Looking for help, the Commander leaned to see past 416 and spotted UMP9 burying a sleeping G11 in the sand. The job was nearly finished: only G11's head was still visible.

"UMP9, please!"
"Hm? Oh, so soon? I thought 416 would take longer to drink through all that~"

Of course, she had intentionally left the bottles visible, hoping to get 416 drunk. UMP9 bounced over and grabbed 416 by the arm.

"What's wrong, 416~? Haven't you had enough~?"
"Enough...? Huh... of course not... it's those idiots from the hotel..."
"Yeah, yeah. Sure~ let's get you inside, you need a rest~"
"I-I don't need a rest! I need..."
"Sure, sure~"

Despite her protests, 416 didn't resist as UMP9 dragged her away with gentle pats and giggles.
Once the two disappeared into the cabin, the Commander and UMP45 exchanged glances—only to burst into loud laughter moments later.
He threw his hair back with a sigh.

"Ah... I'm starving. 45, let's go find something to eat."
"I'm right behind you, Commander~"

. . .

Bit by bit, degree by degree, the simulated sky began to turn into a nostalgic orange.
The umbrella under which that promise had been spoken still stood planted in the sand, but neither of them sat beneath it anymore.

". . ."

Only one person remained on the beach.
The humidity brushing her lips woke her up.

"Huh...?"

G11 opened her eyes and only saw the sea. She tried to move but couldn't; the weight of the sand burying her made it impossible even to open or close her hands.

"Eh...? Eh?! U-UMP9? Commander?!"

You didn't need to be very observant to notice how much the tide had risen since she had fallen asleep.

"T-tide?! In a simulation?! W-who would design something like this?! 416, are you there? 416! 416, help! 416!!!!!!"

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Art: https://x.com/83yui87